

National Allegories in Third World Novel

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Feride Evren Sezer

Boğaziçi University

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Abstract

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by Feride Evren Sezer

This thesis focuses on the national allegorical aspects in Salman Rusdie's *Midnight's Children* and Nuriddin Farah's *Maps*. Although allegorical elements are explored here, the thesis concerns itself with the identification problem of the third world individual, which amounts to the encounter between the West and the East through colonial and postcolonial experiences. The aim is to study how the individual reflects on him/herself with reference to his/her conception of the outside world, and how the two novels criticize and deconstruct fixed meanings imposed on the third world individual.

Kısa Özet

Üçüncü Dünya Romanlarında Ulusal Alegori

Feride Evren Sezer

Bu tez, Salman Rushdie'nin *Gece Yarısı Çocukları* ve Nuriddin Farah'ın *Maps* adlı romanlarında göze çarpan ulusal alegori unsurları üzerine esğilmektedir. Burada alegorik unsurlar araştırılmakla birlikte, sömürge ve sömürge sonrası deneyimlerin üçüncü dünya bireyinde meydana getirdiği kimliklendirme sorunları da tezin ilgi odağını oluşturmaktadır. Kendisini, içinde bulunduğu dünyayla birlikte düşünüp tahayyül eden bireye ilişkin olarak, her iki roman da üçüncü dünya bireyine yüklenen sabit anlamları yapıbozumcu bir yaklaşımla eleştirmektedir.

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Introduction

Literary production in non-Western countries that have undergone a colonial experience, is variously referred to as postcolonial or third world literatures. Although these two terms generally seem to encompass more or less the same literary works, the usage of these two terms indicates a slight difference in the approach to the subject matter. The usage of “postcolonialism” inevitably entails periodization in the history of politics, while “third world” is more of a term referring to geographical location, which, of course, also includes political or social events in that location.

In “The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality”, Aijaz Ahmad highlights that “the major debate on postcolonialism took place [...] in political theory” much earlier than the term’s application in literary theory (Ahmad in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* 280). For this reason, he argues that the usage of “postcolonial” for literary production does not prove to be valid, since, depending on the historical periodization it entails, the term aims to homogenize the “complex structures” of literature. For this reason again, Ahmad implies that “postcolonial” as a term falls short of addressing and interpreting the relation between literary products in formerly-colonized countries and what those countries experience. This “inadequacy” is based on the conception that postcolonialism directly amounts to postmodernist approaches (to the third world, as third world literature is under scrutiny) which solicit “convergent” concepts like hybridity to suggest an understanding of the new subject in the ex-colonies. Although the term “postcolonial” sounds quite “convergent” or general for its initial periodization in the first place, since this periodization is about the colonial experience itself, readings of

hybridity, for instance, which shall be mentioned a bit later, will be able to demonstrate how the colonial experience has played a role in the formation of the third world subject in general, and literary work in particular.

When the term “third world” is considered, again a generalization is at stake, which divides the world dramatically into parts. Of course, this division is a political one, reproducing the discourse of Otherness that prevails in the encounter between the East and the West throughout the colonial period. Despite the general categorizations implied in these two terms, the usage of “postcolonial” or “third world” marks the encounter between the two worlds, namely first world and third world countries. This encounter is indeed a deep one, regarding the direct contact between the East and the West during the colonial period. Third world subjects became acquainted with the ideals of Western modernity, which has contributed to moulding the possibility of political independence, especially during nationalism’s rise in Europe. Besides, this encounter also allowed the third world individual to realize the difference. In this sense, not only Western powers conceived the East as its other, but also the Eastern subject, equipped with the ideals of Western modernity, came to grasp itself as different from the West. The great possibilities of the multiplicity of nations inevitably triggered nationalistic movements in colonized countries, as these countries found a chance to declare their difference. Along with the declaration of their difference, third world countries had to engage in modernization projects since they aspired to acquiring a space in the contemporary world. This aspiration causes the tension between modernization and nationalization processes. On the one hand, the new country yearns to manifest its difference from the first world or the colonial power; on the other hand, it needs to be integrated into

that same world against which it has situated itself. Moreover, since colonialism included direct contact between the colonial powers and colonized countries, it is not possible to consider authenticity (the “primitive” utterly distinct past of the colonized country), because the new country in general, or the new subject in particular has already been marked by the encounter with its Other. This marking accounts for the “hybrid” individual belonging to neither here nor there, but formulating a new understanding of both positions. Therefore, the encounter between the East and the West, marking both positions, lies at the heart of understanding and identifying the self in relation to the context in third world settings.

Thus, the preoccupation with the way the ex-colony is formed into an independent nation or country allows reading third world novels as national allegories. To this purpose, two novels will be studied here, namely *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, and *Maps* by Nuriddin Farah. Both novels were written in English although neither of the writers is from an English-speaking country. The relationship with a foreign language provides a preliminary understanding to the encounter between the East and the West on the basis of identity formation (individual or public). The very usage of a “foreign” language in these two novels discloses the whole period from the colonial states to decolonization on the one hand, and how the new subjects in the new states conceive this process on the other. Such a direct impact of the context (or historical and/or political events at large) on the individual understanding brings us to Fredric Jameson's formulation of national allegory in third world countries. According to Jameson, “*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*” (“Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational

Capitalism in *The Jameson Reader* 320). In this article, the relationship between the public and private is suggested as the distinct aspect of the third world condition. According to Jameson, the Western modern novel has come to formulate a covert relationship with public affairs, whereas this is not the case in the third world where the private and public domains are explicitly intertwined. In the same article, Jameson articulates the basis of this relationship:

It would be presumptuous to offer some general theory of what is often called third-world literature, given the enormous variety both of national cultures in the third world and of specific historical trajectories in each of those areas. [...] One important distinction would seem to impose itself at the outset, namely that none of these cultures can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, rather, they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism – a cultural struggle that is itself a reflexion of the economic situation of such areas in their penetration by various stages of capital, or as it is sometimes euphemistically termed, of modernization (318).

While the first sentence in the quotation accepts the variety among nation formations in the third world, the following remarks, in fact, disclose what Gayatri Spivak describes as “the heritage of imperialism” (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 280-1, qtd. in Ahmad in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory* 277). Even though Jameson’s formulation rests on the capitalist economic condition, the inevitable “life-and-death struggle” or “the heritage of imperialism” point to the lack of an experience of modernity in the third world, which makes it dependent on the imperial or first world countries in the contemporary condition. The urge for independence and difference, therefore, confronts the appeal to modernization, turning the modernization project in the third world into a dependence on the colonial power.

Both *Midnight’s Children* and *Maps* problematize the tension between independence and dependence, difference and mimicry, which permeate the

imagination and understanding of the individual. In this respect, there are at least two levels of meaning in these novels. While the first level is concerned about the individual and accordingly narrates the story of the main character, the second level of meaning refers to what happens to/in the country. Referring to the public or national context, the second level of meaning haunts the first meaning level. This relationship with the outside and the inside world is not based on a one-directional imposition, though. In both books, the main characters are well aware of the powerful influence of the events in the third world on their identities. Yet this powerful influence and the relation to it within the non-western context are criticized through the stories of the main characters. I have suggested that the relation to a foreign language can be a way to approach the identification problems interrogated in third world novels. In both of the novels that are studied here, the foreign language situates the individual outside the boundaries of his immediate setting, and thus represents the moment of encounter which will always be present in the imagination and understanding of the third world individual. This encounter, which is in perpetual flux, and its effect is allegorized in the two novels. However, it should be noted that to read these two novels in terms of national allegories is not to present a perfect correspondence between the national affairs and the individual life represented in the novels. On the contrary, both novels, with different approaches, criticize such a correspondence.

This is the point where a critical reference to hybridity can help in understanding the encounter between the East and the West. Describing hybridity as a strategy “premised on cultural purity, and aimed at stabilising the *status quo*”

(*Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 173-4), Ania Loomba points to the paradox prevailing in the conception and formation of the third world individual:

In practice, [hybridity] did not work [in accordance with the strategy aimed at stabilising the *status quo*]: anticolonial movements and individuals often drew upon Western ideas and vocabularies to challenge colonial rule. Indeed they often hybridised what they borrowed by juxtaposing it with indigenous ideas, reading it through their own interpretative lens, and even using it to assert cultural alterity or insist on an unbridgeable difference between coloniser and colonised.

Based on Loomba's remarks on hybridity, it can be suggested that the application of western ideas in order to reject them is the paradox prevailing in the conception of the third world individual. However, while considering the emphasis on juxtaposing western ideas with indigenous ones, one should be careful so as not to approach the two types of ideas as completely separate, especially when writers like Rushdie and Farah are in question. Grasping these two writers as representing wholly Eastern or wholly Western ideas or conception of the world would lead to reducing the multiple meanings of their works. In this sense, while they are aware of what has intentionally been forgotten in the name of official historiography in their countries, they are also critical of the West's signification of third world individuals based on colonial experience. While allegorizing the discourse of radical difference from the ex-colonies, both *Midnight's Children* and *Maps* also reveal that the construction of radical difference amounts to "nationalist fundamentalism"¹ which is yet another manifestation of excluding the Other. On the other extreme is the mimic bourgeois

¹ In the "Introduction" to *Culture and Imperialism*, Said argues that the concept of culture imposing a sense of identity has come to be associated with "some degree of xenophobia". In this respect, "relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity [...] have produced varieties of religious and nationalist fundamentalism" (xiii-xiv). Although complex connotations of the concept of culture is not the subject matter of this thesis, underlining the point Said makes is proper to the criticism of difference from the Other to the extent of exclusion, which prevails the two novels.

individual who adopts “Oxford drawl”, as Rushdie parodies in his novel, so as to prove that s/he is a modern individual, in the sense of proximity to the West.

In this respect, both novels call the reader to “a genuine philosophy of history [which] is capable of respecting the specificity and radical difference of the social and cultural past” (Jameson: 1982 18) so that it will be possible to “disclose the solidarity of [history’s] polemics and passions, its forms, structures, experiences, and struggles, with those of the present day” (18).

1. The Lullaby of Great Possibilities: a Reading of *Midnight's Children*

The initial setting of *Midnight's Children* is very meaningful. It opens just before India's independence after the Second World War in 1947 from the British colonial power. From the very beginning, the book pursues a palimpsestic narration. The background does not in fact remain at the back. The events are narrated in such a way that they haunt the first level of meaning in which the individual story is narrated. The book is structured by Saleem's autobiography, which, he claims, unearths the hidden history of India. His claim is a huge one: he presents an exegesis of Indian history through himself, claiming he has been shaping Indian history after the independence – a fact which has been erased from the parchments of palimpsests; a fact, therefore, he wants to disclose so that the *truth* is grasped. In this sense *Midnight's Children* is metafictional. Not only Rushdie as an author, but also his narrator Saleem is very self-conscious about his narrative. He makes mistakes about certain events, and then corrects them, or he simply leaves them as they are, since a retrospective correction would change the course of his narrative. Hence he casts doubt on his claim about the correspondence between his life and Indian history. However, Saleem is also conscious of these doubts, and he responds to them by direct reference to the use of language. He explains the correspondence between his life and the Indian nation in terms of speech acts, thus pointing *beyond* his narrative – pointing to the structure of discourse:

'... Your life, which will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own,' the Prime Minister wrote, obliging me scientifically to face the question: *In what sense?* How, in what terms, may the career of a single individual be said to impinge on the fate of a nation? I must answer in adverbs and hyphens: I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively, in what our (admirable modern) scientists might term 'modes of connection' composed of dualistically-combined configurations' of the two pairs of opposed adverbs

given above. This is why hyphens are necessary: actively-literally, passively-metaphorically, actively-metaphorically and passively-literally, I was inextricably entwined with my world (238).

In trying to assure the reader of the authenticity of his text, Saleem's reference to the modes of connection in language is very significant. The correspondence between his life and national history he wants to present is only possible through such a presumption of "modes of connection". Although this explanation comes quite late in the book, each connection Saleem tries to formulate throughout the book belongs to one of these modes. Rushdie forces the reader to make a contract with the main character and the narrator of the book. This contract is not based on a "willing suspension of disbelief." On the contrary, it is more of a call to realize the imagined character of a narrative, though (or perhaps because) that narrative aspires to and claims to be real, just like history. In this respect, in *Midnight's Children* Rushdie depicts and parodies the ideological conventions of historical narrative "which aims to present a 'total' model of society undergoing historical change, and which avoids reminding the reader of its limitations as a textual version of history" (Mazurek in *Metafiction* 195). The ideology in question is Indian modernization through nationalism. In order to construct a firm ground for future projects, historiography has to serve the ideology of that modernization. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* weakens the narrative of such a historiography by revealing the discursive formation of power, and bringing what has been marginalized – more than that, what has had to be forgotten – into the middle of that powerful narrative, contaminating, debunking, and at the same time preserving it.

To Todd Kuchta, allegorical conception serves to deconstruct and reveal the powerful narrative of historiography in Rushdie's novel. Kuchta adopts Benjamin's

conception of allegory in his “Allegorizing the Emergency: Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and Benjamin’s Theory of Allegory”, underlining that allegory is not “a mere mode of designation [of] a conventional relationship between an illustrative image and its abstract meaning” (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama* 162, qtd. in Kuchta in *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie* 207). Rather, he considers allegory as “a type of experience [which] recognizes the evolving relationship between signs and their meanings” (207). By stating that the relationship between signs and their meanings is based on evolution, a radical conception of time is included in Saleem’s, narrative which yields multiple interpretations of the Indian nation.

Saleem is writing his autobiography while he is the owner of a pickle factory with Mary Pereira, his ayah. He is also literally disintegrating because of a fatal disease (or he thinks so).

Please believe that I am falling apart.

I am not speaking metaphorically; nor is this the opening gambit of some melodramatic, riddling, grubby appeal for pity. I mean quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug – that my poor body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by *too much history*, subjected to drainage above and drainage below, mutilated by doors, brained by spittoons, has started coming apart at the seams. In short, I am literally *disintegrating*...² (Rushdie 37).

This point is very significant in terms of understanding his urge to reveal the secrets of Indian history. “[He] must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if [he is] to end up meaning,” because he will die soon. Saleem’s urge to work fast before his death is, therefore, related to meaning construction. He is connected to history from his birth, and this connection has to be revealed to people; in other words he must preserve his memory to construct meaning for future generations. On the other hand this illness also shatters the correspondence between the nation and Saleem; after all,

² Emphases added.

a nation projects itself to an infinite future. But like Saleem, the Indian nation, or, like the Indian nation, Saleem is gradually disintegrating. The parts that make the totality of the new Indian nation have failed to come together in a harmonious form, for the *lot* to be swallowed is indeed a lot. Although Saleem seems to aim at the hidden *truth*, his physical disintegration emphasizes the fragmentary nature of his story, which is at the same time claimed to be Indian history. In this respect, Rushdie makes use of allegory for

its ability to destabilize the apparently natural relationship between form and content, signifier and signified – as a historically situated response to the Emergency³ and to the communal amnesia that threatens to let [Indira] Gandhi's actions fade from the nation's memory. Rushdie's project in *Midnight's Children* is to reconstruct that past through the fragmentary form of allegory (Kuchta in *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie* 209).

Thus, Rushdie interrogates the dream of infinitude and ultimate correspondence in Saleem's character. The pickle factory provides this infinitude. In this respect the pickle factory is Saleem's *memory* itself: while preserving the raw material, the pickling process also transforms it. Although he claims to write the *real* Indian history, his aspiration is contrary to the event character of history. He wants to freeze those events (which are inevitably vulnerable to time) into the mummies of his memory in order to save them "from the corruption of the clocks" (Rushdie 38). What he aspires to realize, in fact, is contrary to the conception of change. Saleem does not want any contingency in his narrative, which is why he needs to discard the contingent workings of time. When he finishes his narrative, he has also finished the jars of special chutneys in the factory:

³ Rushdie started to write his novel in the Emergency period in India when the democratic regime was ceased. Concerning the ending of the novel which lasts with the declaration of the Emergency, this period is significant, and in his article Kuchta reads the novel from the perspective of this period.

Every pickle jar [...] contains therefore, the most exalted of possibilities: the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of pickling time! [...] I have immortalized my memories [writing an autobiography], although distortions are inevitable in [autobiography and pickling]. We must live, I'm afraid, with the shadows of imperfection (459).

With the last statement above, the metafictional structure of *Midnight's Children* has been further justified. This is a deliberate choice Saleem carries out. He is very well aware of the fact that

[memory] selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events" (211).

In fact, such a version of events is an attempt to constitute subjectivity, whose death has been announced in the postmodern period. He thus asserts his self which is not just subject to the events around him, but actively takes part in or directs those events. For this reason, from the first pages onwards Saleem is obsessed with meaning – imagining and constructing a meaning. His own version of Indian history belongs only to him, because “no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own” (211). With this claim, subjectivity turns out to be the utterly subjective, or relative – a possibility among others, but *according to* the narrator, the most truthful one. In this respect,

Saleem conflates his writing with the pickling process, investing the latter with a symbolic meaning that, like his writing, explodes notions of scale: if a single spoon and jar can contain the genetic materials for a whole country, a whole person can contain “the world,” and a single book can contain all of a country's history (Reder in *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie* 242).

By means of the pickling process Saleem has subjectively tried to freeze the future versions of Indian history. However, with the last empty jar, opening a space for the future versions, Saleem takes the dimension of time into account, which will bear new possible interpretations.

The book consists of thirty chapters whose titles are also the names of chutney jars Saleem is making with secret recipes. This structure is another device of self-reflection in narrative technique, but something else needs to be underlined here. Just before the book ends in the thirtieth chapter, Saleem mentions one last empty jar. This jar has been left empty, taking the factor of possibility into account, since “[t]he process of revision should be constant and endless” (Rushdie 460). Although Saleem wants “to set [future] down with the absolute certainty of a prophet [...], [it] cannot be preserved in a jar” (462). There is no escape from this. Even though throughout his autobiography he has performed the role of the Subject, with his desire to swallow everything (after all he is India), he is a subject, a mortal being that can only be limited to a certain time. The all-powerful Subjectivity, in other words, has become his end. I describe the Subjectivity he assumes as an all-powerful one, because Saleem’s national role in history requires this assumption: if he claims that he is directly connected to Indian history at his birth, he has to embody everything in India’s past, present and future. Accordingly, he warns the reader that they will need to swallow “the lot” in order to understand his narrative. In this respect he is well aware of the relationship between history and the present. For this reason, Saleem starts as close to the beginning as possible – a gesture similar to found a genealogy. But this genealogical leap is not similar to the one presented on the first page of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, for example, since *Midnight’s Children* allegorizes out of what kinds of ashes a people is imagined and constructed into a nation.

To formulate the relationship between past and present within the foundations of a genealogy, he begins his narration with Aadam Aziz, his pseudo-grandfather, deferring his birth for almost a hundred pages. This is not an arbitrary choice,

though, because in terms of historical moment, grandfather Aadam⁴ Aziz is an intellectual subject of India's Commonwealth past on the eve of independence. Moreover, Aadam Aziz of *Midnight's Children* bears direct parallelism with Dr. Aziz of *A Passage to India*. Having failed to reconcile with one another, in *A Passage to India*, Aziz and Fielding mark "the pathetic distance still separating 'us' from an Orient" (Said: 1995 244). Although the novel ends with the earth's cry "No, not yet," to declare the impossibility of reconciliation between Fielding and Aziz, "not yet" implies the expectation for the reconciliation to occur some time in the future. Rushdie takes this "pathetic difference" in *Midnight's Children* to suggest that time has not come yet, nor is it likely to occur in the character of Saleem's grandfather Aziz.

Having studied medicine in Heidelberg, Aadam Aziz is the figure who attempts "to fuse the skills of Western and hakimi medicine," in other words, who sincerely attempts to make a synthesis of East and West. However, he is situated between two uncompromising antitheses: his friends in Heidelberg and what he has learnt from them, and Tai, the ancient boatman from Kashmir. Although he admires Tai, who rejects everything foreign to Kashmir because of his ancient wisdom, Aadam Aziz cannot share the boatman's rejection since the thing to be rejected has already constructed part of his identity. This construction includes the ideal of Enlightenment, which is the reign of reason. On the other hand, he is a young Indian doctor, which means he is still different from the Other that Tai rejects. Hence Aadam Aziz is situated in a purgatory between the empirical thinking of the West

⁴ Like Adam, Aadam Aziz is the founder of a family who experience the independence of India and her partition from the Muslims, from Pakistan. He is the initiator of modern Indian history.

and the ancient being of his country. His German friends haunt him, while he suffers “a vacancy in a vital inner chamber” (10) after he decides not to pray again to any god or man. What haunts him in his *profane* decision is in fact a whole colonial history from Western perspective:

‘... The Compassionate, the Merciful, King of the Last Judgment!...’ – Heidelberg, in which, along with medicine and politics, he learned that India – like radium – had been ‘discovered’ by the Europeans; even Oskar was filled with admiration for Vasco da Gama, and this was what finally separated Aadam Aziz from his friends, this belief of theirs that he was somehow the invention of their ancestors – ‘... You alone we worship, and to You alone we pray for help...’ –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, as his hands, guided by old memories, fluttered upwards, thumbs pressed to ears, fingers spread, as he sank to his knees [...] At one and the same time a rebuke from Ilse-Oskar-Ingrid-Heidelberg as well as valley-and-God, it smote him upon the point of the nose. Three drops fell. There were rubies and diamonds. And my grandfather, lurching upright, made a resolve. Stood. Rolled cherooot. Stared across the lake. And was knocked forever into that middle place, unable to worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve. Permanent alteration: a hole (10-11)

This rather long quotation from the book exquisitely stages Aadam Aziz’s reason for disbelief. In fact, “reason” here is too reductive a description to express Aadam Aziz’s situation, because rather than a deterministic line of thinking, a mode of becoming is in question. He has (be)come to be alienated from his culture, from the soil where he was brought up so dramatically that he now experiences a gap in his self-identity. In other words, what he has considered Indian identity has just come to point zero which requires a conscious process of *reidentification*. In his article “Interrogating Identity: Franz Fanon and the postcolonial prerogative”, Homi Bhabha makes a distinction between identity and identification:

Such binary, two-part identities function in a kind of narcissistic reflection of the One in the Other, confronted in the language of desire by the psychoanalytic process of identification. For identification, is never an a priori,

nor a finished product; it is ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality. [...] the image – as point of identification – marks the site of an ambivalence. Its representation is always spatially split – it makes *present* something that is *absent* – and temporally deferred: it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition (*Location of Culture* 51).

Bhabha emphasizes the discursiveness of identification as a process imagined in and through the confrontation with the Other. In this sense, Aadam Aziz's above-cited stream of consciousness is a perfect articulation of such a tension between identity and identification. He has learnt to reflect on India or being Indian in his education in Germany (and later in his friendship with Tai), but his reflection has already been tainted with what he has acquired in the West. Moreover, he is both spatially and temporally split from his desire. He is no more in Heidelberg, his friends are not with him to dispute; and more significantly, he is trying to reunite himself with an earlier self (before going to Germany) which will always have been past from then on, since he has been marked by the experience of encounter. Undoubtedly, he has rejected his German friends because of their opinion about India. In this rejection, a whole literature of Orientalism is interrogated. He hankers to reconstitute his *authenticity* as an Indian subject, but blind submission, say to religion, is no longer blind for him. This acute recognition or knowledge leaves him "in that middle place".

What is being depicted in Adam Aziz's middle place formulates the background of the newly emerging Indian nation. Through young Aadam Aziz, we are able to grasp the initiation phase of India into the modernization process. And Aadam Aziz is a culmination of the expectation to become something new – as a nation. His education and self-formation must have coincided with the "Hindu Reform and Revival" in the 1880's and early 1900's, a date, apparently belonging to the Commonwealth (Sarkar 205). Although this reform was a movement to reconstitute

what is Hindu back to India, its point of departure was a national consciousness which was possible in and through a *contact* – not only confrontation – and communication with Western colonizers. Therefore it is clear that, though a controversial term, colonialism is defined in terms of an “implanting of settlements on distant territory” (see Said: 1994 8), which leads to a direct contact with the colonizers. It also leads to the colonizers’ establishing Western ideas and institutions in the colonies. In this direct contact, education plays an important role for the colonized people, as it has done for Aadam Aziz: although colonial education sought to provide a Western education so that it could enlighten the native people forming an intelligentsia, it also made it possible for those privileged natives to get acquainted with the ideas of nationalism, class consciousness, and independence, which would soon *blemish* the “ideals” of colonialism. Aadam Aziz is the first generation of such dichotomously formed intelligentsia in *Midnight’s Children*. Atavistically, he is the founder of a family, whose son and not real son at the same time will *determine* Indian history. Aadam Aziz, therefore, is a very significant beginning for Saleem’s narrative, because he includes the sentiment of expectation and essential problematic engraved at the beginning of Indian modernization. He refers to the palimpsest on which new Indian history is written, which will follow a slightly different course in time.

Pursuing such a line of thought, the *midnight* of *Midnight’s Children* metaphorically reveals these great expectations (and yet hidden problematic) projected towards the future in India, because at that midnight a historical moment has happened: at that *midnight* India became independent of the British Raj. In this sense, the *children* are the newly born citizens of the newly established state. They

are the bearers of great possibilities promised by the assumed and legitimized difference. As such, each of these children – most importantly, those who were born at the exact stroke of midnight – is India herself, and accordingly they will remain vulnerable to whatever happens to/in India. Due to this great meaning, in Saleem's terms, these children are the victims of the "optimism disease"; a belief that these gifted children could achieve something significant for the sake of their country.

A thousand and one children were born; there were a thousand and one *possibilities* which had never been present in one place at one time before; and there were a thousand and one dead ends. Midnight's children can be made to represent many things, according to your point of view: they can be seen as the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation, whose defeat was entirely desirable in the context of modernizing, twentieth century economy; or as the true hope of freedom, which is now forever extinguished; but what they must not become is the bizarre creation of a rambling, diseased mind. No: illness is neither here nor there (Rushdie 200).

Ultimate resistance to absurdity is the dead end of this optimism disease. Although Saleem declares that above anything he fears absurdity or loss of meaning, the *mission* of midnight's children can never be accomplished. The optimism disease is, in fact, not unique to Saleem, nor is it so to the period these children were born. Many years before, Saleem's pseudo-grandfather Aadam Aziz was seized by this illness in the hope that all India might get united under one single leader – Aadam's optimistic belief in the Hummingbird (Mian Abdullah) was an earnest credo, despite the fact that independence did not bring peace to India, leaving poor against the poor. And Saleem's expectation is not very different from his grandfather's. Of course in the turbulent years after independence this belief proved to be in vain, for the monstrosity of the "many headed" monster was impossible to suppress. The many heads were primarily the Muslim League and other Hindus, which would be divided into further factions, in India.

It's like being surrounded by some terrible monster, but she corrects herself, no, of course not a monster, these poor poor people – what then? A *power* of some sort, a *force which does not know its strength*, which has perhaps *decayed* into impotence through never having been used (81).⁵

The above quotation is taken from the passage where Saleem's mother Amina Sinai is going to hear a soothsayer's prophesy about her child to be born. Being a woman from the newly developing upper middle class, and the daughter of Heidelberg-educated doctor Aziz, the knowledge of back-street suburbs is not at her disposal; for this reason when she calls those people "monster", she corrects herself with the melodramatic phrase "poor poor people". This correction is not completely melodramatic, though, because Amina Sinai is more stunned by the fact that there are white people among the poor. She is stunned by this spectacle since whiteness belongs to a higher hierarchy. In this passage, the dramatic class difference is important as well as something else: this social difference is superposed on something related to Saleem's birth. The "power" or the "force" of those people indicates their role in social upheavals, while specifically referring to the powerful *truthfulness* of the prophesy Amina is about to hear about her son. Similarly, the time of Saleem's birth will stage social upheavals which will be impossible to repress. So Saleem has already started to superpose the particular/individual on the general, at times subverting and reconstructing the latter. Because this is his birthright. Because he has to make meaning if none is left. His so-called historical role that is his *birthright* will insert its irresistible existence to such an extent that Saleem, throughout his life, will not be able to escape giving meaning, in most cases to the extent of absurdity, to whatever he experiences. "I admit: above all things, I fear

⁵ Emphases added.

absurdity” says Saleem (9). Ironically enough, throughout his narration to Padma, his only listener while he is writing this book, he self-consciously tries hard to prove the authenticity of his lines, fanning away clouds of disbelief hanging over Padma, since he is well aware of the fact that what he narrates transcends the limits of credulity. In fact, he has assumed the role of India, as opposed to Indira Ghandi who will be referred to as “the Widow” later in the book.

I have described *Midnight's Children's* narrative techniques, mainly, in terms of allegorical and metafictional devices, together with palimpsestic movement. Describing the narrative in terms of palimpsest will yield an understanding of the movement of Saleem's narrative, which is superposition. This movement is the only movement Saleem could use, since he claims to shape and be shaped by what happens to/in India. Through superposition, he aims to approximate being and phenomenon, which allows the meaning levels in the novel to shift through the use of speech acts mentioned earlier. In this way, Rushdie criticizes any perfect correspondence between the subject and object, or the private and public meaning levels which predominates the novel. The imbalance between the grand national and the petty individual levels of meaning enhance Rushdie's criticism. Saleem's urge to resist the petty individual meaning makes him end up with the absurd, which is his deepest fear. Indian independence in 1947 is Saleem's christ. His birth at the exact moment of independence enhances this conception. Moreover his birth was prophesied:

‘A son, Sahiba, who will never be older than his motherland – neither older nor younger [...] There will be two heads – but you shall only see one – there will be knees and a nose, a nose and knees [...] Newspaper praises him, two mothers raise him! Bicyclists love him – but, crowds will shove him! Sisters will weep; cobra will creep [...] Washing will hide him – voices will guide

him! Friends mutilate him – blood will betray him! [...] Spittoons will brain him – doctors will drain him – jungle will claim him – wizards reclaim him! Soldiers will try him – tyrants will fry him [...] He will have sons without having sons! He will be old before he is old! *And he will die... before he is dead*” (87-88).

These prophecies will prove to be true, according to Saleem, one by one while Saleem connects the events in India to his life. He “will never be older than his motherland”, which is India, because of the instant of his birth. “There will be two heads”, because Mary Pereira, Saleem’s ayah will change the name tags of two babies. Thus Saleem will not be the real son of his family. Moreover the two babies will be each other’s antitheses, yet strongly connected too, since they are the ones who were born at the exact instant of independence. Saleem will have a majestically big nose, while Shiva will have destructive knees. “Newspaper praises him” after he is born. He will be declared to be the symbol of the nation; therefore his authenticity will be ratified. Mary Pereira and Amina Sinai will raise him. So from birth he will have two mothers. He will be shoved off due to his ugliness. When he falls fatally ill, cobra poison will rescue his life. He will hear voices, the voices of all midnight children. Each midnight child is gifted preternaturally, and telepathic power is Saleem’s gift, which is ironically discovered by accident. He will lose his hair and the top of his finger, thus he will be mutilated. When he loses his finger and a lot of blood, it will be discovered that his blood does not match either his father’s or mother’s. He will discover his gift of telepathy or “hearing voices” after a blockage in his sinuses, and he will lose this gift after a sinus drainage operation. “Spittoon will brain him”; since when he loses his memory when hit by his mother’s spittoon after the explosion in the Indo-Pak war, he will carry the spittoon as a reminiscence of his family. Then he will gain his memory in the jungles of Sundarbans which will

in this sense claim Saleem's identity. And he will be brought back to India by the "wizards", the magician ghetto members. In India "soldiers will try him" after Saleem is caught by Major Shiva, his alter ego whose family Saleem has taken by Mary's intervention. He attributes this trial to the Widow's (Indira Ghandi) paranoid knowledge of midnight's children. She knows these children were declared to be India; therefore they were threatening her power. So Saleem and other midnight children will be "fried", will become impotent so that they will not be able to reproduce. And "he will be old before he gets old"; like Aadam Aziz, he will literally crack at the age of thirty two.

This much is Saleem's prophesied life. I will try to show how Saleem superposes them on the events in India.

*

Saleem's ayah Mary Pereira sings a lullaby into her nurtural son's ear:

Anything you want to be, you can be:
You can be just what all you want (127).

And she had every reason to believe so. After all, even before he was able to utter a single word, he had already been declared or ratified to be the symbol of the newly-founded nation. And Mary, because she was the one who had witnessed this *historical* moment, was stunned by baby Saleem's role in history. Furthermore Saleem was, and throughout her life will be, her most intimate sin committed in the name of her love. She had changed the name tags of the two babies who had been born at the instant of Midnight (India's arrival at her independence), in the mere hope of proving her love for Joseph D'Costa, who was looking down at her because she could not grasp the turmoil at hand in the aftermath of independence of India.

You don't know nothing, Mary, the air comes from the north now, and it's full of dying. This independence is for the rich only; the poor are being made to kill each other like flies. In Punjab, in Bengal. Riots riots, poor against poor. It's in the wind (104).

are Joe's accusations against Mary, while at the same time describing the world into which Saleem had *tumbled forth*. With her great sin Mary wanted to prove that the poor could do something, that if they were granted the chance, if they could be equipped with the possibilities a rich family might provide. Pious and submissive Mary, contrary to her nature, challenged God's will and tried to make a rich *sahib* from a poor-born baby. Joseph's accusations also describe the world into which Saleem *tumbled forth*. Here, the verb Saleem uses to describe his birth is noteworthy in many respects. He does not say "I was born", "I opened my eyes" or anything more assertive, but intentionally describes his situation with the verb "tumble" to imply the role of mere coincidence (in terms of being born at that instant, and being changed by the nurse) at his birth. And this role of chance, too, casts a sardonic doubt on the great meaning he attempts to formulate, pointing beyond History.

Aadam Aziz has been significant to articulate the colonial intellectual on the eve of independence; that is, within the temporal limits of colonial history. When we come to the Indian *citizen*, Saleem needs another medium to articulate this new period, because the novel dismantles and discloses particular/individual and general/national levels of meaning in and through Saleem's relationship with other characters. Methwold's Estate provides such a medium for Saleem, in which he can formulate the identification of the new citizen. After independence his parents Amina (formerly Mumtaz Aziz) and Ahmed Siani move from Old Delhi to Bombay – a displacement, which is at the same time a replacement, because "[...] place,

displacement, and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all postcolonial literatures” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 9). It is a replacement because it positions the postcolonial subject in space and time, signifying the identification process the new citizens of India undergo, especially those who are to constitute the newly developing upper middle class. Bombay is the

Prima in Indis
Gateway to India
Star of the East
With her face to the West (Rushdie 93).

The city has witnessed the encounter between the East and the West throughout colonial history. After independence it becomes the elite placement of the new state. It is elevated as the star of the Indis; it is unique among the multiplicity of India, and/because it faces the West since it was the star of the English settlers. And (now ex-)colonial William Methwold has constructed his Western *estate* in that city, with his garden parties at six p.m. everyday, with his identical villas “majestically named after the palaces of Europe: Versailles Villa, Buckingham Villa, Escorial Villa and Sans Souci”, importing Europe into India, thus transforming the latter into something new. In this respect, the move into Methwold’s Estate is quite significant in understanding the formation of the new citizen. Although the estate is a remnant of the colonial past, the inhabitant “six-foot Titan” William Methwold is not going to leave it as a remnant (95)⁶. Forcing a condition in the sale contract that all the properties should be kept after the new owners buy the villas, William Methwold is, indeed, playing the last game of the colonial: kindling the place of the desired object in the new Indian owners’ minds. The British were the white masters, owners of

⁶ This and the previous quotations are taken from the stated page.

luxurious places and leading genteel lives; and they want this convention to continue after they leave. The identity this desire will construct becomes the new bourgeoisie of India. They need to be transformed, appropriated, and identified by this desire for a *modern* Indian nation. “The estate,” in this sense “is changing [the new Indian inhabitants]. Every evening at six they are out in the gardens, celebrating the cocktail hour,” hence appropriating the Other to attain the new requirements of modernized authority. In this appropriation they are scrutinizing Methwold whom they mime, and when he shows up on the party stage “they *slip* effortlessly into their imitation Oxford draws” (99)⁷. What they stage, so long as this desire is concerned, is indeed

slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) [which] does not merely ‘rupture’ the discourse but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the [new] colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence (Bhabha 86).

And Methwold, in the role of a supervisor, is pleased with this transformation:

“‘Sabkuch ticktock hai,’ mumbles William Methwold. All is well” (Rushdie 99).

Saleem is born or “tumbles forth” into this “Anglicized” world which “is *emphatically* not to be English”(Bhabha 87) because “Europe repeats itself, in India, as farce” (Rushdie 185). His role, being born at the exact instant of India’s independence, is further enhanced (and Saleem enhances this role dramatically in his urge for meaning) by the fact that he is *the* first generation of such mimic men of modern India. Moreover he is tethered to this colonial past and its mimicry not only through the “imitation draws” of his parents, but also through his real parentage (by which he repeats this farce) (99): he is conceived from an adulterous intercourse his real mother (Venita) had with William Methwold, which means Saleem bears the

⁷ This and the previous quotations are taken from the stated page.

seeds of a Hindu Indian woman and a British colonial master. This is a further, almost pathetic moment within the desire of the mimic man Bhabha elaborates on. With his Anglicized education in a Jesuit school, and (through utter mimicry) his Anglicized father (Ahmed Sinai) – who also imagines his ancestors to be the great Moguls – Saleem is “emphatically not English”, but emphatically he is not Indian either – not just in cultural/historical/social terms, but biologically as well. If

[t]he success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and *menace* (Bhabha 86),

Saleem, then, is the embodiment and the limit of this menace. He is threatening because he will forever be the reminder of this mimic identification, disturbing and debunking any claim to authenticity, even his own. For this reason the children of midnight have to be “fried”, discarded; not by death perhaps, but by impotence.

The hybrid character of modernized/nationalized India “with her face to the West” is reified in Saleem’s problematized parentage. Even before he is born, before he learns the secret about his real parentage, he has already lost grounds to *be* – to identify himself. Rushdie underlines Saleem’s groundlessness in family relations, which gain their significance through a long history. In the labyrinths of this history Saleem is cast forth (or he tumbles forth), always seeking a mother or father as a pivot of meaning for his being in India. And all that long history, “the lot” in his terms, is disclosed one by one in his search for a family. Through “the lot” the reader comes to realize multiple levels of meaning. Through the multiple relation of Saleem to “the lot” and ultimately to history in his own version of giving meaning and identification, Saleem becomes all India. The movement of his self-identification is a forking path: while he is openly identifying himself with the India he signifies, this

identification, to the extent of a desire for perfect correspondence between history and the *subject*, is a game lost from the start, because the ubiquity of the *subject* is disturbed by the multiplicity immanent in Indian history in general, and Saleem's past in particular. Though Saleem seems to assume this multiplicity within his body, fragmentation is at stake, and he is dying metaphorically and literally. And his death is the ironic instant at which the correspondence between the subject and history is shattered.

In addition to his birth, he is physically India, too, as Mr. Zagallo declares violently:

‘*thees* is human geography!’ [...] ‘In the face of *thees* ugly ape you don’t see the whole map of *India*? [...] See here’ [pointing at his nose] – the Deccan peninsula hanging down!’ [...] ‘These stains,’ he cries, ‘are Pakistan’ *Thees* birthmark on the right ear is the East Wing; and *thees* horrible stained left cheek, the West! Remember, stupid boys: Pakistan *ees* a stain on the face of *India*!’” (Rushdie 231-232).

So physically as well as mentally, Saleem is India personified, and in accordance with this personification he assumes responsibility for certain events that befall India. Pakistan, “the land of the pure”, is a stain on India’s face, and Saleem contributed to this filth actively-metaphorically: When the Sinais decided to move to Pakistan, concluding that nothing was left in India for the Muslims, they spent some time at Major Zulfikar’s (who is the husband of Amina Sinai’s sister Emerald) house. Major Zulfikar has moved to Pakistan for an ambitious military career in “the land of the pure”. And he has obtained that career during his involvement in Pakistani revolution. The interesting part of this revolution is Saleem’s metaphorical engagement in its execution. During a dinner at the Major’s house, to which military authorities attend, Saleem contributes to the revolution plan by positioning table

condiments for Major Zulfikar to explain what the course of the revolution would be. Rushdie parodies Saleem's claim by articulating as serious a historical event as a revolution through an absurd plan made by means of condiments. Therefore, Saleem is absurdly responsible for the revolution in Pakistan, just as he was responsible for the partition of the state of Bombay, since he actively triggered the violence of language groups ("many headed monsters"), when he encountered them by chance answering to the group's taunts with a childish rhyme "designed to make fun of the speech rhythms of the [Gujarati] language" (191). Because that language group was against Gujarati, they adopted this rhyme as their song of war.

Another superposition takes place on Saleem's tenth birthday, which is at the same time the second five year plan of India that has been destroyed by "the intolerable heat of 1956." This destruction has forced the government "to announce to the world that it could accept no more development loans unless the lenders were willing to wait indefinitely." Under this heavy defeat in economics "the number of landless and unemployed masses actually increased" – a state of poverty "greater than it had ever been under the British Raj." During the years of this defeat of the second five year plan, although an increase in economic production was achieved, "illiteracy survived unscathed; the population continued to mushroom." And all the grownups invited to Saleem's tenth birthday, though they seemed to enjoy themselves, were asking the same question: "Ten years, my God! Where have they gone? *What have we done?*" At the end of these ten years, which have, in a sense, been spent in vain, Saleem establishes the Midnight Children Conference, as if to ground these vain years on a great unity, gathering all the children of midnight thanks to his telepathic power that was granted to him as his birthright. "That's how

it was when I was ten.” Saleem draws the parallelism, “nothing but trouble outside my head, nothing but miracles inside it” (205-207).⁸

Established under such turmoil and upheavals in the state, the Midnight’s Children Conference has inevitably turned into a medium of multiple thoughts:

[...] among the philosophies and aims suggested [at the conference] were collectivism – ‘We should all get together and live somewhere, no? What would we need from anyone else?’ – and individualism – ‘You say we, but we together are unimportant; what matters is that each of us has a gift to use for his or her own good’ – filial duty – ‘However we can help our father-mother’ [...] – capitalism – ‘Just think what business we could do! How rich, Allah, we could be!’ – and altruism – ‘Our country needs gifted people; we must ask the government how it wishes to use our skills’ – science – ‘We must allow ourselves to be studied’ – and religion – ‘Let us declare ourselves to the world, so that all may glory I God’ – courage – ‘We should invade Pakistan!’ – and cowardice – ‘O heavens, we must stay secret, just think what they will do to us (228).

Saleem is disappointed to see that there is nothing new among these ideas. Everything is too usual for this multitude of miracles. Everything is usual, because the children of midnight are India. Whatever takes place in India leaks into the ideas of this conference: collective consciousness of communism, capitalism’s desire for wealth, Indian-Muslims’ enhanced piety, and hatred against “the stain on India’s face,” which is Pakistan... of course cowardice that immediately vanishes with great promises of infinite possibilities. In short these children, like India, have been stunned by their *power*.

Among these children Saleem dislikes Shiva the most. Saleem’s urge to unite being and phenomenon has been mentioned before, which includes a negation of the boundaries between outside and inside. In *Midnight’s Children*, Shiva functions as the ultimate outside which might be read as Saleem’s alter ego. Their confrontation

⁸ All quotations in the paragraph are from the given pages; emphases added.

or Shiva's challenge to Saleem is the particular act through which the existence of an outside imposes itself most powerfully for the first time. Therefore, Shiva is a destructive force which annihilates Saleem's project of correspondence between being and phenomenon. When Saleem optimistically talks about the purpose of the children of midnight, Shiva challenges him:

For what reason you are rich and I'm poor? [...] God knows how many millions of fools living in this country, man, and you think there's a purpose! Man, I'll tell you – you got to get what you can, do what you can with it, and then you got to die. That's reason rich boy. Everything else is only mother sleeping *wind* (221).

Shiva's challenge above is proper to his name and to what that name signifies. Shiva is "the god of destruction," in Hindu mythology, "who is also the most potent of deities" (221). That is, he is the god of destruction and proliferation at the same time – the life principle, which is situated in opposition to Saleem's timid, well-to-do upbringing. Although the difference between the two is dramatic, they cannot be separated either, because while Shiva refers to the ancient tradition of the "Indis" that connotes the uncanny life principle, Saleem signifies the relation to colonial history which has also shaped the Indian *citizen* after independence. India "had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt", and Shiva reveals this history.

[N]evertheless [India was] quite imaginary [...] a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a *phenomenal collective will* – except in a dream we all agreed to dream; it was a mass fantasy shared in varying degrees by Bengali and Punjabi, Madrasi and Jat, and would periodically need the sanctification and renewal which can only be provided by rituals of blood. India, the new myth – a collective fiction in which anything was *possible*, a fable rivalled only by the two other mighty fantasies: money and God (112).⁹

⁹ Emphases added.

Shiva is the blind spot in Saleem's narrative, shifting the levels of meaning between which Saleem tries to formulate a correspondence. In this sense, Shiva reifies a part of India that is too ancient to evoke, and therefore resists Saleem's transformation or interpretation. Although this India is nostalgia, paradoxically enough its influence on the new Indian individual cannot be denied either. And now, with independence, all ethnic differences dream the unity of India against the British Raj – a multiple difference which will demand further sanctifications, for instance Bengal's, Pakistan's, Rann of Kutch's. And these sanctifications are provided by "*rituals* of blood"; another way of saying war. But war would not be sufficient to express this ancient principle of destruction. Therefore the moment the ancient myth withdraws, it also asserts itself. Likewise Shiva always reminds the limit of collectivism which Saleem desires to establish.

Saleem's urge for collectivism and meaning transcends the limit that Shiva poses to Saleem only once, after the Indo-Pak War of '65. In the war Saleem loses all members of his family, except his sister. Moreover, he loses his memory. The connection between his past and present has been cut off, erasing all the connections between his life and India. There is one reminiscence left to him, which is the silver spittoon that he holds all the time, without knowing why. At that time the Sinais had already moved to Pakistan, and his sister had become Jamila the Singer, "bulbul of Pakistan." And because of Saleem's incestuous love for her (although they are not real brother and sister) Jamila Singer hates Saleem and sends him to the Pakistani army. In other words, Saleem has become a citizen of Pakistan. This is very important for the novel's structure because since the beginning, Saleem has been declared the symbol of the Indian nation. However this great meaning does not

dissolve when Saleem becomes a *true* Pakistani, but when he loses his memory. Therefore, when the limit of Saleem's identity and expectations are transcended, he *is* no more. Despite Saleem's suffering and physical mutilations due to "the lot" to be swallowed in order to understand him, there is no other possibility for him to *be*. For when he ceases to embody everything, the identity he has constructed is also lost. And the chapters named "The buddha" and "The Sundarbans" perform this transcendence where Saleem's self is lost.

In the army he is assigned to the CUTIA troop; that is bitches or she-dogs. Unlike other boys (or male soldiers), his task is, like a dog, to track. After the sinus drainage operation Saleem has discovered his new olfactory ability. He has found out that he can discern the smells of feelings as well as objects. (Together with the optimism disease mentioned before, his olfactory ability is the second inheritance from his pseudo grandfather Aadam Aziz.) This ability of Saleem's has not escaped the attention of the commanders and he has become a man-dog. Because nobody knows his name or history, he is called the buddha (meaning, simply, old man) by the boy soldiers in the troop. With this name, he has, in fact, just become anybody – devoid of the great meaning he has assumed as his birthright. However, despite the amnesia, he is able to superpose his memory-less period on Pakistan:

...I suggest that at the deep foundations of their unease lay the fear of schizophrenia, of splitting, that was buried like an umbilical cord in every Pakistani heart. In those days, the country's East and West Wings were separated by the unbridgeable land-mass of India; but past and present, too, are halves together; just as consciousness, the awareness of oneself as a homogenous entity in time, a blend of past and present, is the glue of personality, holding together our then and our now (351).

Like Pakistan's schizophrenia, Saleem, too, is suffering a split in his personality. The price he pays for discarding the multitude of "the lot" that disintegrates him is indeed

what he is; that is, his conscious identification. This loss of consciousness, which is at the same time Saleem's seceding from his historical responsibility, leads to the partition of Pakistan for which, after recovery, Saleem feels responsible. And even during this period of amnesia, history does not let him go. During the Cutia unit's last tracing they come across a river with a familiar name:

Padma. But the name is a local deception; in reality the river is still Her, the mother-water, goddess Ganga steaming down to earth through *Shiva's* hair" (358).

His other self, alter ego, is approaching towards him, or he is heading towards his old and *real* self, unawares. And his odyssey reaches its climax in the jungle of the Sundarbans.

In "The Sundarbans" chapter the magic realistic narrative technique is at its climax. But what those magical events underline is the concrete and unbearable reality. In this most unrealistic of settings, the three boy soldiers of the unit (Ayooba, Farooq, Shaheed) experience the cost of war, because they feel the pangs of conscience for the first time:

Ayooba Shaheed Farooq found their ears filled with the lamentations of families from whose bosom they had torn what once, centuries ago, they had termed 'undesirable elements'; they rushed wildly forward into the jungle to escape from the accusing, pain-filled voices of their victims (364).

What they experience is the impact of war without one drop of blood. In the absence of war's physical violence, the Sundarbans' surrealistic setting is able to disclose utter violence. Earlier in the book, further sanctifications within the multitude of India had been mentioned. And this is the point those sanctifications have come to. Only Saleem or the buddha survives from the jungle. After India's victory over Pakistan, the wizards reclaim his memory. As the Indian troops enter Pakistan with

festivities, Parvati the witch, another midnight child from the magicians' ghetto in India, realizes Saleem. Thus, Saleem is reconnected to his personality, and ready to assume his historical role once again.

Once Saleem comes to India, he pursues his great responsibility, still believing in the great possibilities of the midnight's children. And, sooner or later, nothing but the other part of his self is at stake for him – Shiva in other words. Try as he may, he can no longer ignore the persistence of his other half. His life has been a commitment to unity, to a self-sufficient meaning. Yet his effort to formulate such a meaning has, in fact, revealed the insufficiency of that very meaning. And Shiva is the pivot of that insufficiency. As a life principle, uncannily and naturally he imposes himself on Saleem who cannot escape this imposition anymore. The way and the moment Shiva appears on stage is another very interesting instant of superposition.

... in short, while anger seethed in Shiva's mind, the country was getting angry, too; and what was being born while something grew in Parvati's belly? You know the answer: in the late 1974, J.P. Narayan and Morarji Desai formed the opposition party known as the Janata Morcha: the people's front. While Major Shiva reeled from whore to whore, the Indira Congress was reeling too (412).

The baby of Shiva and Parvati is growing in Parvati's belly, whom Saleem will father. And this baby's birth will soon coincide with the Emergency period in India, which will also be the last period in history mentioned in Saleem's autobiography. And like the children of midnight, the children of Emergency are unique in terms of the period when they are born. Through baby Aadam, and the Emergency period, two generations are in question, which are connected to history with firm ties. In this sense, the novel's movement closes upon itself: first, Saleem fathers this baby and names him after the baby's real grandfather, Aadam. And secondly, we have another

generation of children, whose historical position should also be marked. Saleem's account of baby Aadam's birth is almost the same as his:

He was born in Old Delhi... once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: Aadam Sinai arrived at a night-shadowed slum on June 25th, 1975. And the time? The time matters, too. As I said: at night. No, it's important to be more... On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms. Oh spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at Emergency, he emerged (419).¹⁰

The previous quotation about the parallelism of Shiva's reeling from whore to whore and Indira Ghandi's reeling has, therefore, served as a foreshadowing of the Emergency period that will make the midnight children impotent, and that will cause "Sperectomy: the draining-out of hope" (437). In this hope drainage, Shiva is, indeed, performing his last and most violent destructive act. He seizes Saleem and takes him to Indira Ghandi, then all the children of midnight are caught and they are operated, so that they will become impotent; that is, they will be unable to reproduce. Ironically enough, Shiva and Parvati's child survives, without Indira Ghandi's knowledge. And this is a crack in the sperectomy for Saleem. The last jar which has been intentionally left empty, taking the element of possibility into account, is connected to baby Aadam's existence as the child of Emergency from two midnight-born parents.

[While] we, the children of Independence, rushed wildly and too fast into our future; he, Emergency-born, will be is already more cautious, and biding his time; but when he acts, he will be impossible to resist" (425).

And there is time for his or other Emergency-born children's actions. As Saleem will be celebrating his thirty first birthday, just like India, and going to Kashmir – just like Aadam Aziz, perhaps, to die – with Padma for a honeymoon, he

¹⁰ The emphasized sentences are italicized to indicate the same sentences used for describing Saleem's birth on page 9.

will also be ready to die; “to be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of multitudes, [being] unable to live or die in peace” (463). *Midnight children’s* was an epoch of great expectations, huge historical roles, as a nation came into being together with them. But the future, the element of possibility and (though sardonic) hope are preserved in the last jar. And this hope is seeded in Aadam Sinai, who takes his roots from the children of midnight, while having the strength and resolution that is particular to the era he has emerged in. Rushdie exposes hope, the moment it is assumed to vanish – yet with a questioning tone. He thus accumulates and explodes the multitude of India.

2. The Lull before the Storm: a Reading of *Maps*

When we consider Farah's *Maps*, we encounter a simpler plot in comparison to Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Instead of pervasive references to certain incidents in the national history, the narrated story in *Maps* opens up identity as a question, making the conception of national identity an internal battlefield of the subject who is struggling to pronounce his/her individual autonomy in a third world country. In this sense, "Farah's protagonists [bear] a degree of loyalty that threatens to overwhelm their autonomy and that also provides occasions for dominating others" (Alden and Tremaine 100). Considering this predominate concern, what the novel deals with is complicated, far from being simple, for the locus of human identity in time and place is at stake. From the perspective of the mentioned plot structure, it is easier to present a brief summary of the novel, which will be helpful to follow the rest of this study.

The novel's initial setting is the embattled Ogaden region over which a national struggle is going on between the Ethiopians and the Somalis. While both sides claim the region as their own, the Somali forces are also struggling to declare their independence from the Ethiopian imperial power. The main character, Askar, is an orphan whose mother died while conceiving him. His pro-Somali militant father had died before Askar was born. Misra, an originally Ethiopian woman who lives in the Ogaden region, finds Askar, and on the community's consent, mothers him. However this consent is not a willing one; rather the community has to give consent because the newly born baby does not permit anybody else's caring but Misra's. In other words, like the will of a nation to independence and power over a region, Askar assumes the will to choose his mother as early as his birth. This parallelism between

the nation and himself (even when he was a baby) is underlined by his name; *askar*, meaning soldier. Just like a soldier he is and will be the defender of what he claims as his own. The relationship between Misra and Askar, therefore, is something more than a natural relationship between a mother and her son. Formerly a displaced slave, Misra gets to know her child-self through Askar, while Askar becomes acquainted with himself and the world around him through her. Towards the end of his childhood Askar goes to Mogadiscio, the capital of the Republic of Somalia, to live with his maternal uncle Hilaal and his wife Salaado. This displacement creates a crisis in him, since he has not experienced metropolitan life before. Here, through education, his nationalistic sentiments gain further strength, and he starts to question his identity. The novel is a compilation of Askar's childhood memories he recollects when he is in Mogadiscio, trying to decide whether to join a Somali military front to fight in the war against the Ethiopians. Moreover, he has recently learned Misra's betrayal to the Somalis in the Ogaden by telling the place of pro-Somali soldiers to an Ethiopian soldier whom she has fallen in love with. This betrayal increases the degree of his crisis of self-identity, although, as we later learn from Misra, the betrayal is a slander.

Through Askar's memories and experiences, the book interrogates the question of self-identification which is such a ground-shaking event that the subject (who is, ironically enough, simultaneously the object of identification) becomes "a question to [him/her]self" (Farah 3). Thus opens Farah's *Maps* – indeed a question mark that wraps up the subject. Accordingly, the question "Who am I?" predominates the book, not, of course, to seek an answer, but rather to dig deeper into the question. The main character Askar, throughout the book, almost literally hankers to bear himself – a

claim he has based on his being an orphan – which brings him to a profound sense of presence to the extent of his claim or belief that he was present – in the sense of consciousness – at his birth. This claim is the sublimation of his desire to *be* – to be involved in every step of his self-formation. To perform Askar’s self-becoming, the novel is structured around his passage from childhood to adulthood in which he tries to identify himself as a subject. This inner journey consists of his recollections and signification of past events into meaningful forms that will arm him with points of reference for his self- present identity. In the novel this structural formation around memories is very important to understand the construction of meaning. The retrospective movement is similar to “historical enquiry [that] could be seen as a way of freeing up the past from its mere pastness” (Kennedy 52). While untethering the past from its “mere pastness”, Askar inevitably reinterprets and rearranges what he has experienced or understood, or even been told to as a child. All these dim and indiscreet memories, which are mostly narrated in second and third persons in the book, culminate in Askar’s first-person narration that provides an organized, but limited understanding of his past. Therefore, historicizing is Askar’s act to accrue meaning, which is never fixed “for enquiry is always reinterpreting past events” (52). In fact, he is experiencing the crisis of self-identification precisely because he attempts to fix significations through his passage to adulthood: on the one hand, because he has identified Misra in terms of cosmos or the context of meaning, she is the object of his ultimate desire, thus he cannot contaminate the faithfulness between a mother and a son; on the other hand, Misra has betrayed the mother-country that is the surrogate mother for the adult self. Situated between these two extremes, Askar tries to make a black-and-white decision in vain.

It is also important that Askar's quest for self-identity takes place in Mogadiscio where he receives a modern education, living with his maternal uncle Hilaal and his wife Salaado.

Literacy, then, eventually produces 'a sense of change, of the human past as an objective reality available to causal analysis, and of history as a broad attempt to determine reality in every day (diachronic) area of human concern. This in turn permits a distinction between *history* and *myth*' (JanMohammed 280, qtd. in Ashcroft, et. al. 80-81).

Under the light of this focus on literacy as a prerequisite of historical meaning, Askar makes a distinction between his "non-literate" past with Misra and his literate present while he is questioning and giving meaning to that past. He begins to comprehend Misra through her Ethiopian identity after he starts his education in the capital city. Until that time Misra has been his mother and a woman, whereas now she is also labeled by her nationality, which leads to a classification triggered by his literacy. Moreover he has listened to his birth over and over again, and how Misra found him from her like a mythical story. These stories are mythical because Misra gives a discreet meaning to baby Askar, which in turn leads to Askar's mythification of himself and Misra, too, as a child. She has often told Askar that the baby Askar existed in the look, as if he were conscious of the happenings around him. This supernatural description of a baby creates the above-mentioned sense of presence in Askar. That is why when he gets his identity card for the first time in Mogadiscio, he is disappointed since Misra is not mentioned on it. His identity card without Misra creates a disappointment in Askar because it marks the end of his mythical conception. In other words, in the realm of the *written word*, Misra does not occupy a place; this fact is verified by her living in the Ogaden whose belonging to a country is uncertain; that is, she is neither Somali nor Ethiopian. Like many dwellers of the

Ogaden, she lives in a purgatory. Askar, on the other hand, has been initiated into his nationality with this identity card. And from now on his understanding or signification will not be marked by the oral myth, but by the *written word*.

It is unfair, I thought to myself, that Misra wasn't even given a mention on my identity card. Now I discarded my earlier belief that this was because she was Oromo and I, Somali. Perhaps, I concluded, it was because our relationship dates back to before my coming to Mogadiscio and before - goes back to before I myself acquired the Somali identity in written form. I reminded myself that Misra belonged to my non-literate past – by which I mean she belonged to a past in which I spoke, but could not write or read in, Somali (Farah 172).

The emphasis on language as a constituent of national identity bears significance in revealing the process of self-identification. Through access into language, one is able to mark the difference between the self and others. Whereas this difference is essential to identity, the separation from “the state of nature”¹¹ is an agonizing experience. And this agony discloses why and how Misra's absence is able to cause such a deep disappointment in Askar. In other words, what does Misra mean to Askar in his “non-literate past”? The meaning of her name in her own language is quite significant in this respect: foundation. Like her name, she is the world or context of Askar's “non-literate past”. He learns every essential information (insight is in fact a better word) from her, apart from fulfilling his basic needs such as feeding and cleaning:

Misra, who was his only world, the content and source of his secrets, the only one whom he trusted and in whom he confided; she whose arm, large as anything he had touched or seen, would extend upwards and with short fingers point at the heavens, naming it; the same fingers which cleaned his face or dried his nostrils and had the agility to point subsequently at the earth on which

¹¹ The reference here is to Lacan's “Real stage” in which the child is only concerned with meeting its needs – if this could be called a concern. During this stage the child's *being* is enthusiastic with its environment, which means that it is not a self for there are no boundaries between itself and its surrounding. For this very reason, this stage is doomed to end for the sake of *Being*. However, according to Lacan, the enthusiastic bliss of this stage remains as an object of Desire during the Imaginary and Symbolic orders.

she sat, her thoughts, like a pendulum, going from the sky (God's abode?) and the earth (feeder of man?) and then himself or herself. It was she from whom he learnt how to locate and name things and people, she who helped him place himself at the centre of a world – her own!
 'Where is the sky?' she would ask him.
 He would point at it.
 'And the earth, where is the earth?'
 And he would point at *her* (56).

The quotation above discloses how Askar has come to understand the world *through* Misra, because

“life, like nature, indeed is not *immediately* accessible, nor is it accessible to intuition except by way of an (intellectual) operation of subtraction applied to the world” (Haar 25).

While Misra abundantly presents a world to Askar where he becomes the center, she is comprehended in terms of the earth “(feeder of man?)” – no more and no less, for attributing “earth” to Misra is a profound delineation. It is a profound delineation because by “feeder of man”, Farah does not only mean obtaining food, but also devouring an abundant source for the sake of self-becoming. That is why Misra is cosmos to Askar. On the other hand a profound understanding of human location is disclosed in Misra's above gesture and Askar's perception of it: while teaching Askar the sky, human being (mother-son), and the earth, she is sitting on the earth, pointing at the sky, the earth, and him or herself respectively; that is, she situates human being between the heavens – implying the sacred – and earth – implying the mundane. Situated in this locus, Askar learns from Misra that “everything had a past, a present, and a future [...] One had to know to read it” (Farah 56). Here, by “everything” Askar exactly means every single thing in the world leading to an understanding of it. Such a gesture does not simply articulate a unity between phenomena and being, though. Rather, it is phenomena in the world exposed to or

permeated in time. It is through this exposition that Misra's divining or power of prophesy by using raw meat or blood is given. Her prophetic power is contrary to Western rationalism, and like Shiva does to Saleem in *Midnight's Children*, serves to remind the antithetical component immanent in the formation of individual in the third world. In this irrational conception, meaning cannot be simply *deciphered* but "the *history* of the earth can be *read* [or interpreted, like Askar's memories] in its *eclipses*," that is, in the dark side (37). And indeed Misra's portrayal bears darkness as much as she opens up herself abundantly to Askar's needs.

In colonial discourse, [...] space is time, and history is shaped around two, necessary movements: the 'progress' forward of humanity from slouching deprivation to erect, enlightened reason. The other movement presents the reverse: regression backwards from (white, male) adulthood to a primordial, black 'degeneracy' usually incarnated in women (McClintock in *Social Text* 31/32 1992).

Of course, Askar does not perceive Misra in terms of the colonialist approach suggested above. But the regressive movement or withdrawal is important in conceiving Misra's significance to Askar as cosmos. On the one hand, she is the one that teaches him how to locate the human being, and that the meaning of the world can be read; on the other, she withdraws from Askar during her menstruation period – a period of womanhood or motherhood. Yet, strangely enough, Askar is able to associate this withdrawal with Misra's womanhood. In this sense, the most intimate relationship between the two is the limit of any articulation or explication. Therefore, just like her and his skin, Misra is the dark side of Askar's signification. It is this side that will keep him, almost with aversion, away from Misra when he learns that she has betrayed the place of Somali militants to an Ethiopian soldier she has fallen in love with; through this darkness it will again be possible for him to question his

nationalistic sentiments, and particularly wrath towards her. Askar's wrath against Misra consummates in violence against her when Uncle Qoorax and Aw-Adan (the preacher Misra once fell in love with in the Ogaden) accuse her of betrayal. Although these two men are the traitors, Misra becomes their scapegoat because she is non-Somali; that is, only she can be the traitor. And when some men in the region rape her for punishment of her so-called betrayal, they say that she was raped by the baboons, reducing the position of the marginal to that of the beast. Similarly, by believing her betrayal, Askar reproduces the violence to the Other, cutting all possibilities of negotiation with the other. This is a critical point in the novel which manifests that, contrary to his urge for an autonomous identity, Askar is unable to detach himself from a secure point of reference for his identification, since after Misra, the mother-country Somalia becomes a point of reference for him.

Askar's self-identification bears an important role in this conflicting approach and later reproach toward Misra. Misra's physical description is always huge and abundant from which he felt himself as an extension. As a child, therefore, he does not have a sense of unity, but dependence on and a sense of situating himself through Misra. Such childhood recollections implicate the Lacanian phase of the Real in which the child does not consider him/herself as a unified body, but is only oriented towards the fulfillment of his/her basic needs. On the other hand, Askar's difference has always been emphasized positively, at times to the extent of elevation, by Misra; and negatively by community and other family members in general. It is true, though, that even before he himself declares this difference, his situation is a unique one: an orphan without a mother or a father, moreover whose mother died while giving birth to him. This huge loss complicates a Lacanian reading of his becoming a

self. In as much as the question of self-identity turns into a quest for self-identification through Askar's childhood memories, the novel makes a Lacanian reading possible. However, what I have described as a complication dominates the story to such an extent that Askar has been exposed to a fundamental loss because of his orphanage, which is a lack of a blood tie. Hence his claim to being present at his birth. Deprived of a primary foundation, that is his mother, he was all alone at his birth. This claim to presence is understood in his conception of death which "was to [him] simply a metaphor of 'absence'" (Farah 32). And because (his mother's) death marks his birth, Askar *was* there.

Askar's belief in and claim to presence is condensed in his attraction to water which is described in terms of his "foetal existence":

So, in depthless water, my beginning. It was water ushered me into where I am, water that made me the human that I am, water that gave me foetal warmth – and a great deal more. Water was my *mirror* and I watched my reflections in it, reflections at which I smiled and which grew waves – waves dark as shadows – when I dipped my hand in. I was fond of drinking from the very spot across which my shadow fell (35).¹²

In this scene, like the child in the mirror stage, Askar is fascinated by his reflection. The above scene is, perhaps, the beginning of a series of Askar's self-images. Narcissistically he is so saturated in himself that he feels self-enclosed, like a foetus in the womb, and self-sufficient since he encounters the *unity* of his own construction. Although the child is fascinated by the constructed *unity* of his *image*, "the maturation of his power is given to him only as *Gestalt*, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted."¹³ Here, Askar's realizing himself or feeling self-sufficient is triggered by his *image* that is

¹² Emphasis added.

¹³ Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience".

other than himself. Hence the dialectic of object-subject that prevails identification for Lacan who describes it in terms of “the transformation that takes place in the subject when he *assumes* an image.”¹⁴ In this respect, while describing the mirror stage as “a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation [...] and, lastly, to the armour of an alienating identity,”¹⁵ Lacan characterizes this object-subject dialectics as essential to identification. Similarly, Askar’s fascination with his reflection on water is the beginning of his perception, moreover his realization, of *I against the rest*. But at this stage his identification is not alienating yet, particularly toward Misra, for his dependency on her has not come to an end yet. Because Misra is still that huge cosmic source, who is not quite exterior since she still engulfs Askar and meets his needs without his demanding. Quoting Misra’s recitation of “Ode to Nature”,

A mother receiving little, giving a great deal. It makes a mother take delight in the giving and the child (or man) in the receiving. This shock is greater when one learns one must give – not always receive. A shock so great, it is like falling suddenly an unexpectedly from a great height, onto the lap of death. Amen (Farah 37).

In other words, Askar will have other self-images to whose demands Misra will be unable to live up to. That is why when he grows up he will have to kill Misra: “‘Just like [he] killed [his] mother – to live’” (59) – to become a fully independent being, to “fall suddenly onto the lap of death” or absence so that he could realize himself just like he did at his birth. The cost is huge, for this reason, he tastes blood in his mouth whenever he feels he has lost something which will create the sense of lack in him. Therefore death is independence and possibility to *be* for Askar. Moreover, Misra’s

¹⁴ Ibid., emphasis added.

¹⁵ Ibid.

above acknowledgement of the mother's withdrawal from her son is the repetition of mother-son separation Kierkegaard articulates in *Fear and Trembling*: "When the child is to be weaned the mother blackens her breast, for it would be a shame were the breast to look pleasing when the child is not to have it" (Kierkegaard). Similarly, Misra withdraws from Askar especially after his circumcision, and this is what Askar has wanted. But to realize this painful separation, Askar needs Misra's encouragement; Misra has to withdraw from Askar so that his desire for separation is enhanced.

So the child believes that the breast has changed but the mother is the same, her look loving and tender as ever. Lucky the one that needed no more terrible means to wean the child.

[...] When the child has grown and is to be weaned the mother virginally covers her breast, so *the child no more has a mother*. Lucky the child that lost its mother in no other way (46).

Askar's desire to separate himself from Misra is based on his desire to be a man, for a grown up man does not need a mother to sustain his existence. The price Askar pays for this particular separation is the feeling that he "no more has a mother". To cope with this loss Askar needs a surrogate maternal figure, and it will take him long to acknowledge that this loss is a necessary one and that he is lucky for not losing his mother in another way.

To understand the breaking point of Askar's dependence on Misra, we need to go back and comprehend his circumcision – his initiation into manhood. This initiation separates Misra and Askar dramatically once and for all. From this moment onwards, Askar is well aware of the fact that he is no longer Misra's physical extension, although she has nourished him with a primordial sense of security until that time. They will never share the same bed again, as Misra is a woman and Askar

a man. Although they have been mother and son to each other, the blood tie has always been a lack in their relationship, so with circumcision the relation between the two is, in a way, reduced to that of a man and woman. On the other hand, through circumcision, Askar falls from the cozy warmth of his mother onto “the lap of death”. From this time onwards, he will for ever desire the Real stage of his life, which will always be a loss for him, thus, for which he will need to reconstitute as firm a substitute. Yet still a substitute, not the Real itself; for this reason it has to be grander in meaning, more encompassing that is capable of uniting multitudes, perhaps among which he will forget or find ways to cope with his loneliness. Accordingly, his mother country Somalia fills in this gap. Somalia becomes a surrogate mother to Askar, which is as abundant and as huge as Misra:

In a month or so, especially now that his manhood was ringed with a healed circle, the orgies of self-questioning, which were his wont, gave way to a state in which he identified himself with the community at large. [...] The war was on. [...] But what mattered to Askar was that it presaged, for him, a future *maturer* than he had awaited, that it predicted a future in which he would be provided with ample opportunities to *prove that he was a man*. [...] What mattered, he told himself, was that now he was at last a man, that he was totally detached from his mother-figure Misra, and weaned (Farah 100)¹⁶.

The emergence of Askar’s national sentiments are on the one hand triggered by the ongoing war between Ethiopia and Somalia over the Ogaden province; on the other hand Misra has an indirect role in the flourishing of these sentiments and consciousness in Askar: When his paternal uncle asked Askar what he wanted as a circumcision present Misra gave the answer that he had always been interested in maps. By this way he gets acquainted, for the first time, with the physical image of the two countries. Like seeing his image on the surface of water and thus being

¹⁶ Emphases added.

fascinated by it, in these maps, he encounters the totality of the mother country, which serves to compensate the profound loss of Misra. However, just like his image, these maps are images; that is, they are human made, imagined and thus declared by other people, whose totality is, in fact, as vulnerable to crises or questioning as his identity. In this sense, the concept of cartography is significant as it discloses the constructed nature of the sentiment of *natio*¹⁷. In other words, Askar's maps are the cartography of his imagination. And the fact that these maps are drawn and created by some other people enhances the imaginary character of the nation. When Askar is leaving for Mogadiscio, Misra entrusts him to a man on the truck, who thus remarks on the working of the sentiment of nationalism among his people: "Our memories, our collective or if you like, our individual pasts. We leave our bodies in order that we may travel light – *we are hope personified*. After all, we are *the dream of a nation*" (129)¹⁸. The word "dream" while indicating this constructed or imagined nature of the nation, also discloses a belief in possibility. This does not simply mean believing that *anything* is likely to happen. On the contrary, what makes this statement a very political declaration is that it underlines a belief in a unified community. We might "travel light" even after we die, because *the* nation – that dream of the unified community – will be perpetuated to an infinite future. Precisely thanks to this projection towards an infinite future, which transcends the lifespan of an *askar* – the defender of a formidable and permanent cause – is the self ready to relinquish his life in the name of his desire.

¹⁷ The sentiment of *natio* or belonging is articulated here in terms of Renan's formulation of nation as a "spiritual principle" (19). See "What is a Nation?" translated and annotated by Martin Thom in *Nation and Narration*, pp 8-22.

¹⁸ Emphases added.

The national cause and desire to become a unified, autonomous body have been described in terms of a transcendence of one person's lifespan; in other words, this cause surpasses the present so that we could "travel light" or rest in peace. The basis of this powerful or surpassing desire is selfhood defined in terms of citizenship:

"How would you describe the differences which have been made to exist between the Somali in the Somali Republic and the Somali in either Kenya or in the Ethiopian-administered Ogaden?" I said, again feeling that I had expressed myself poorly.

[Uncle Hilaal] answered, "The Somali in the Ogaden, the Somali in Kenya both, because they *lack* what makes the self strong and whole, are *unpersons*" (175)¹⁹.

Hilaal's remarks on the self-formation through a unified and legitimate state is crucial to comprehend Askar's desire to fight for the independence of the Somalis in the Ogaden. The Somalis under the administration of Kenya or Ethiopia, or who live in the embattled Ogaden are *yet* to become full selves. They have not become full persons yet because they lack the primordial point of reference or the spatial matrix of their being, which would define their borderline and specify their area of independence – so that they could *be* as they are. The "unpersons" Hilaal has in mind are all those people who are forced to immigrate to the capital city or to another country because of the ongoing war, or who live under the domination of another country. They are "unpersons" because "the perception that being located at the centre, and that nothingness (by implication) is the only possibility for the margins" marks the "geometry of colonialism" which "operates through the constant imposition of the feeling of disorder, placelessness, and unreality" (Ashcroft, et. al. 89). To rid those multitudes from the negating prefix *un*, the specific character of that people has to be declared and a space of existence has to be opened. This

¹⁹ First emphasis added.

specification in fact marks existence among the others, and ultimately requires a belief in the difference of such an existence (of course this existence needs to be legitimized by means of an independent state). Indeed, it is this belief in the difference that maintains and reproduces Askar's national sentiments:

Hilaal said, "Ethiopia is the *generic* name of an unclassified mass of different peoples, professing different religions, claiming to have descended from different ancestors. Therefore, 'Ethiopia' becomes that *generic* notion, expansive, inclusive. Somali, if we come to it, is *specific*. That is, you are either a Somali or you aren't. Not so with 'Ethiopian', or for that matter not so with 'Nigerian', 'Kenyan', 'Sudanese' or 'Zaïroise'. The name 'Ethiopia' means the land of the dark race" (Farah 155)²⁰.

Bearing such a meaning, then, Ethiopia is able to encompass or include the people with dark faces, namely the Somalis, too, who desire to live independently under their own flag, and who, for this end, declare and struggle for their cultural difference. The generic hegemony of Ethiopia, in this respect, could be read as an example of the operation of imperialism, which is clearly distinguished from nationalism. Making "cultural nationalism" the focus of his attention, Simon During claims that nationalism is something different than imperialism, describing cultural nationalism as a move "*against* imperialism" since this movement is the recognition of differences at its dawn. However this conceptualization, according to During, is subject to a twist, because imperialism or imperialist nations "must regard [themselves] as having a world historical culture" (see During in *Nation and Narration* 138-153). By referring to certain historical events that have shaped the Somali people, *Maps* discloses the place the Somalis are situated in, problematizing the imperial power inserted upon them while disclosing their self-identification before this imperial hegemony; namely (my)self and the rest. Through Uncle Hilaal's

²⁰ Emphases added.

remarks on the generic and specific kinds of the nation, it is possible to see the operation of such a belief in the difference of one's own culture (that aspires to become a nation), and how this belief creates an identity crisis in the subject. Acknowledging the uniqueness of Somalia which is named after the Somalis – a fact that emphasizes the specificity of the Somali nation – Hilaal articulates the firm bonds between a culture and its people. However, his approach to this is not tainted by the romantic expectation in the triumph of the specific over the generic. He is well aware of the fact that a generic kind of nation like the imperial Ethiopia cannot stand movements of independence that are generated by ethnic cultures under its rule. For this reason, although “[t]he Somali-speaking peoples have a case in wanting to form a state of their own nation...”, there is a “‘but’ which stands in the way of the Somali” (Farah 156). In this respect, the book, especially through Hilaal's remarks on nationalism, allegorizes the power relation between the center and the periphery.

It has been stated that *Maps* consists of Askar's childhood memories when he is trying to decide whether to join the pro-Somali front. In other words, he is on the verge of executing the significance of his name, being a soldier. Although Askar seems convinced that he “has a job” to complete, which is the honorable responsibility to fight for the nation, Hilaal's opinions about the sentiment and politics of nationalism make him reflect upon himself. He has already been charmed by the city of Mogadiscio; “for him, [the city is] a temporary haven. [He] will leave [her] but will always love [her]” (168). This charm is a complicated one. According to Hilaal, Mogadiscio owes its charm to its *illuminated* history.

There are historical monuments that date from the ninth century; there are mosques, tombs which mark with bones the histories they illustrate (167-168).

On the other hand, this unique quality of the city is wielded by “neo-colonial governments [...], leaving the hinterland to its own disastrous destiny” (167). The more the city is brilliant and glimmering, the more it dazzles the subject to the extent of blindness, say, to famine, war, starvation going on just beyond. When Askar realizes that

the Africans [just beyond] weren’t the kings, the queens, the bishops and not even the pawns – where [they] were part of the reserve; [their] land was nothing but a playfield; [their] wars were turned into weekend affairs (168),

he decides to fight for his people. Although this fight is against another black country, the politics operating beyond Ethiopia’s imperialism is also a fight against all colonial power which also includes the white settlers. In this sense Askar’s nationalistic sentiments could be read in terms of “Négritude” pronounced by Césaire. In this conception, the black culture is elevated regarding its “emotional rather than rational” mode of being (Ashcroft, et. al. 20). Such a strong conception is apparent in Askar’s above view of Africa’s exploitation by the *other* culture. Moreover, in this exploitation nothingness or non-being is assigned to the marginal ones who are cast off as denizens. This implication of nothingness has been pronounced before by Uncle Hilaal’s description of the displaced immigrants who have been forced to flee their settlements in terms of *unpersons*. Askar is very well aware of this gesture, so his nationalistic sentiments are enhanced by this awareness. On the other hand, the sea rises in Mogadiscio “suggesting other worlds, other cultures” which lure the visitor and the resident, and which promise the possibility of some other self-identification, through education perhaps, as Salaado and Hilaal suggest to Askar as opposed to his will to fight in the battlefield for a national cause (Farah 166). Askar’s conception of his past with Misra has been described in

terms of “non-literacy”, however his life with his uncle in the capital of the Republic of Somalia requires well education. His indecision whether to join the fight at the battlefield or to continue his education is triggered by the necessity to seize “the means of communication and the liberation of post-colonial writing by the appropriation of the written word,” since this appropriation is the only possible way to enter “the process of self-assertion and [to obtain] the ability to reconstruct the world as an unfolding historical process” (Ashcroft, et. al. 81). Only in this way, it will be possible to enter the space of the civilized. That is why, once again, according to Hilaal neo-colonialism produces cities like Mogadiscio (or Bombay in India) which, while disclosing the difference of that culture, reveal its worth to become a part of the new world system. Considering this perspective, Askar is fascinated by Mogadiscio’s difference because the city is *theirs*, at the same time he feels the possibility of passage to other cultures, of obtaining knowledge that will erase the vulnerability of illiteracy to domination.

Askar thus reflects on his national identification which is, inevitably, influenced by his self-reflexive gesture. Misra’s profound, but suppressed role in his reflections are obvious, because throughout the book, Askar has yearned to identify himself with regard to a primordial point of reference that could substitute the origin of the womb: at first that substitute womb was Misra; then it shifted to the *mother* country, not the *father* country since being an orphan has always been the most implicit, if not pronounced, identification of his self. In this sense, the tension between Misra’s so-called betrayal and his Somaliness marks his self-reflections on his identity. For this reason again does he remain vulnerable to his country and Misra. During the Tragic Weekend, for instance, when “the Soviet, Cuban and

Adanese generals (with a little help from the Ethiopians) masterminded the decisive blow which returned the destiny of the Ogaden [...] to Ethiopian hands,” Askar was seized by malaria. The illness attacked him so fiercely that, he “didn’t know night from day. In a point of fact, [he] could’ve sworn the earth had been shaking under [his] feet.” In other words, he lost his location on the earth, which has always been the source of significance for him, “when the nation mourned the loss of the Ogaden” (Farah 162-163). Similarly, Askar was ill again when Misra’s dead body was found in the ocean.

Her body was prepared for the burial and Askar was not present. They buried Misra and he was not at the funeral. That night, when he was taken ill suddenly, he resisted to being admitted to hospital. Indeed, it came to pass that he and Misra were in the same hospital – he in the men’s ward, she in the sexless ward – the mortuary – but in the very wing he spent the night in, although she was in the basement and he in a private room on the third floor. He was alive and she dead; he, very hot, because of his high temperature, whereas she was in a freezer and therefore ice-cold. He, who had known of her lying in state in the mortuary in the basement, saw her in his dream and she was a queen, on a throne, leading a procession of sorts, and event of a kind. Did Misra see him in her dream? Do the dead dream? (250)

The above passage articulates the execution of Askar’s separation from Misra, which he has desired since childhood so that he will become a *man*. Despite juxtaposing Misra and Askar in the same hospital, the above scene discloses the end of unity between the mother and the son through life and death opposites. However, because they reveal Askar’s preoccupation with Misra, the same opposites unearth the fact that Askar still conceives Misra in terms of the significance of his being, which leaks into his dream. Like his malaria during the Tragic Week, his illness at Misra’s funeral represents Askar’s vulnerability to loss in the deepest sense. And this loss, paradoxically, makes it possible for Askar to brood on his identity from the beginning. His creditor is nothing or nobody this time, but himself. That is why he

confesses that he might have suggested verses fourteen, fifteen and sixteen of Sura Looqman, if he had known about Misra's funeral. These particular verses in Sura Looqman are concerned with the relationship between mother and son, which are important to understand the beginning of Askar's reflections:

14. We have suggested his mother and father to man: His mother carried him in great difficulties. Weaning from milk lasted for two years. So be grateful to me, and to your mother and father. The return is to me.

15. If they force you to associate that which you do not know anything about with me, do not obey them. In the world, get along with them according to the traditions; but pursue the path of the ones that follow me. Your ultimate return is to me. I will tell you all your deeds.

16. [Looqman is speaking] "Dear son, the truth is God will see whatever you do, though it is so little, though it is hidden in a rock, the heavens or the earth. Because God is the **All-good**, his goodness is infinite; He is the **Omnipotent**, he knows everything (*Kuran'ı Kerim Meali* 375)²¹.

Of course, the theological meaning of these verses is not the subject matter of this study, but they posit a crucial point of reference to understand how Askar feels about Misra as a mother. The cited verses start by an elevation of maternal devotion to the child, hence calling the child to express his gratitude to the *cause* of his being. But the child should appeal to God (according to the verses); that is, to the true path. Although the weaning lasts two years, it eventually happens, which requires the child to look ahead. The *cause* of being should always be remembered, but anticipation should not be overlooked. In other words, these verses are Askar's chants to look back at and appropriate himself each time in the face of his feeling of loss. In this sense, while the verses mark the necessary separation between mother and son, they also open up the possibility for Askar to acknowledge whence he is coming from so that he will be able to look ahead on his own path. By doing so, Askar will be able to take a significant step to realize self-autonomy.

²¹ The English translation is mine.

At the end of the book, a few days after Misra's funeral and Askar's discharge from the hospital, the police come to Hilaal and Salaado's house to investigate Misra's murder. After all his self-reflections and questionings, Askar begins his investigation with his name: "'Askar Cali-Xamari.' And that was how it began" with nothing but his name, now that he has been stripped of all his identifications and is ready to understand and interpret his story once again. Hence the beginning of "the story of (Misra/Misrat/Masarat and) Askar. First, he told it plainly and without embellishment," to sort out all his opinions and memories so that he is ready for the encounter with himself. "[T]hen he told it to men in gowns, men resembling ravens with white skulls." The police officers, his uncle and aunt, perhaps himself too gradually turn into the phantoms of his past so as to remind him of an ancient palimpsest waiting to be brought to the present once again. "And time grew on Askar's face, as he told the story *yet again*, time grew like a tree, with more branches and far more leaves than the tree which is on the face of the moon." He is so saturated in his recollections that he has become all the actors involved in a process of police examination:

In the process, he became the defendant. He was, at one and the same time, the plaintiff and the juror. Finally, allowing for his different personae to act as judge, as audience and as witness, Askar told it to himself (259)²².

Rather than putting a full stop, such an ending opens up the possibility of new understandings so that the subject reappropriates him/herself to the present situation. Moreover this reappropriation is a spot where the subject is all alone in the sense that he or she gives meaning to all self-identification processes, which requires him/her to take a distance to the previous points of reference or associations. At the end of the

²² All the quotations in this paragraph are taken from the given page.

book, Misra is still dear to Askar, even more so than the time he tried to hate her for betraying Somalia. However this endearment is not similar to his attachment to her during his childhood, because in the end he has accomplished to construct the distance between himself and Misra he has long yearned for since his initiation into adulthood. At this point of the book, for the first time Askar realizes that the distance to Misra is in fact not a loss but the radical possibility of communication with the other. Left to his solitude in the end, Askar passes from the “transitive” relationship with Misra to “the absolutely intransitive element” of his existence (Lévinas 42-43)²³. Such a passage also excludes a violent relationship with the other since the other is no longer objectified, which is to say that Misra is not some source to be devoured any more, but one’s radical other to communicate over the distance in between. Throughout the book Misra has been either a source of (enthusiastic) bliss or the source of national wrath to Askar; that is, Askar has always identified what he is *through* her, either in disdain or in elevation. But at the end of his story he comes back to himself in the most radical sense – he only refers to his name, and begins his story yet again by himself.

²³ In *Time and the Other*, while discussing the relationship to beings, and Being of existence, Levinas describes the intransitive mode of existence in terms of “something without intentionality or relationship.”

Conclusion

Allegorizing the nation within the context of the third world novel is indeed complex, once the relationship between the East and the West in the colonial period is grasped. When this relationship is considered, two major movements to relate to the Other are seen; namely, encounter and confrontation. The East's confrontation of the West during and after direct colonial experience connotes a certain degree of resistance to imperialism that is prevalent in our present day in indirect manifestations such as multinational capitalism and global monetary policies. In the course of this confrontation, the East declares its difference from its Other, the West. On the other hand, throughout colonial history there has been an inevitable interaction with the West, which has intertwined the two parts of the world. This blend or encounter, intensified by the appeal to being modern like the West, is particularly problematic for the third world individuals, since they have been marked by the ideals of the West, against which they attempt to situate themselves, in order to declare their difference and independence.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Farah's *Maps* are two of the novels which manifest the tension between self-signification and signification of the Other in third world modernization projects. This tension requires a radical appropriation which is painful for the new individual's identification in third world nations. Therefore, the double move which is implicit in the self-appropriation of third world countries as independent nations bears the problematic of self-identification. Ex-colonies have dispersed into new and modern (always with a "proximity" to what is Western) nations, which, paradoxically enough, have meant much firmer and more grounded nation-states, susceptible to their own histories that have been intentionally excluded

from nation formation processes. The lack of a genuine historiography, therefore, has been the price the ex-colonies have had to pay for modernization. Both novels attempt to reveal this price to criticize its aftermath influencing the individual. The first level of meaning narrating the individual stories seems to have a direct relation or in Saleem's case, correspondence to the second level of meaning which includes the national and historical affairs. This relationality and correspondence are shattered in both novels by representing the conception of nation as "the new myth which [is] a fable rivalled only by the two other mighty fantasies: money and God" (Rushdie 112).

While elaborating such a narrow conception of history and time, *Midnight's Children* and *Maps* interrogate the idea of self-identity, although their approaches to the issue are different. Still, some common elements in each novel's approach to the issue can be highlighted. In this respect, both Saleem and Askar overestimate their identities within the context of their nations. Saleem attempts to rewrite Indian history, reminding the audience that they will need to "swallow the lot" in order to understand him. The accent on "the lot" encompasses the whole history of Indian colonization and later independence, making Saleem a paranoid subject assuming that every single incident in the history of India is connected to him in some way or another. This paranoia mutilates the course of Indian history in *Midnight's Children*, underlining the imagined character of the nation and its history. In this sense,

Rushdie's narrative faces the complicated and ambivalent problems of representation: [...] it must write out of the uneasiness that besets postcolonial fiction, as it confronts the discursive difficulty of containing the referents of *novelty* and *history* within a recognizable grammar (Suleri 175)²⁴.

²⁴ Emphases added. Although Suleri mainly reads *Shame* in this chapter, I have cited the general remarks on Rushdie's narrative.

The problem of representation is indeed a complicated one because, by superposing Saleem's narrative on the national history, the book allegorizes the events in India through Saleem's ostensible narrative. In other words, the more Saleem hankers to reveal the real events in India, the more subjective his narrative becomes. By debunking the claim to the truth, Rushdie attempts to "hide in allegory and magic realism [...] alliance between explosiveness and nostalgia," so that an aesthetic novelty is mapped in the third world conception of oneself and the world (175). To map this *new* aesthetics through allegory, Saleem's self-referential narrative does violence to itself with the motivation that "because it cannot possibly do *justice* to its history, it can at least do *violence* to itself"; hence Rushdie reveals the injustice or violence that has taken place in the history of India in the name of Indian modernization (175). Rushdie's concern with "novelty and history" or "the alliance between explosiveness and nostalgia" is a radical criticism of the either/or logic dominating the binary opposition of authenticity-inauthenticity. Especially in the portrayal of Saleem's family as a member of the new Indian bourgeoisie, now dwelling in Methwold's Estate, Rushdie problematizes the center-periphery relationship, manifesting that an immanently authentic existence is not possible, nor will it be possible to simply devalue the new subject as inauthentic. What is in question is the hybrid individual that should be grasped as such. It should be noted that Rushdie's hybrid individual is homogenous. On the contrary, the individual who has experienced the colonial encounter is heterogeneous, which dramatizes his/her fragmentary identity. Although with Methwold, Rushdie allegorizes the British colonial power's desire to impose its power as it is taking its leave, that power will

remain open to transformation in the hands of the new Indian nation. Moreover, Saleem is the embodiment of this new and hybrid Indian subject due to his heterogeneous parental origin. His real father is William Methwold with whom his real Hindu mother Venita had an adulterous intercourse. He knows neither real his mother nor his real father, but was brought up by the wealthy and Muslim Sinais. Therefore, like Askar, Saleem lacks the parental origin to refer to as his primary identity. Being a blend of Hindu-British-Muslim identification, Saleem literally embodies almost all the referents of “the lot” the reader has to swallow. Therefore, through Saleem’s heterogeneous identity, Rushdie leaves the reader overwhelmed by the intricacies of self-identification. In his attempt to include “the past [that] has dripped into him[self]” (Rushdie 38), Saleem has got “elephantiasis” (48)²⁵ instead, leaving him with melodrama and absurdity that frustrates him in life more than anything else. Despite his frustration of the trap of absurdity, Saleem’s overestimation of himself and his excessive urge for meaning make him absurd and melodramatic. And Rushdie allegorizes the obsession with meaning in Saleem’s character.

On the other hand, Askar in Farah’s *Maps* is not an absurd character. However, Farah is also concerned with self-identification focused on politics as *praxis*:

I see politics..., not as the idealized machinery in which government takes decisions that are good or bad for the people. I see politics as an area in which every individual, be it a little a girl or an elderly man, can leave his or her mark. I see politics as the summing up of a people’s daily lives (Alden and Tremaine 79)²⁶.

²⁵ Here Saleem refers to one of Nadir Khan’s friends who was a painter. The painter attempted to be a miniaturist, but trying to get the whole life in his paintings, he ended up with elephantiasis.

²⁶ This quotation is taken from the epigraph to the section called “The Politics of Autonomy” in *Nuriddin Farah*.

Askar's engagement with the "political" question "Who am I?" originates from his attachment to the mother figure Misra, before his national commitments. Indeed, his identification of "politics" is a frustrated one because of his attachment to a mother figure, be it a woman like Misra or his mother country Somalia, on the one hand, and his desire to declare self-autonomy which requires detachment from that mother figure on the other. Therefore, like Saleem, he experiences a certain apprehension, not due to his imposition of correspondence between himself and the events in the national history, but because of his attempt to seek referents for his identity, which, in fact, constrain his self-autonomy.

Another source of Askar's apprehension could be grasped within the context of Somali consciousness that is based on "collective action and responsibility, not merely [...] shared history and experience, that give life and meaning to an individual's sense of identity as a member of a lineage group" (6). Concerning the "sense of identity as a member of a lineage group", being an orphan Askar lacks the mark of genealogy. Although when he was a child his ruthless paternal uncle Qoorax financed his upbringing and later his maternal uncle Hilaal provided him with a Somali identity card making him a "person", and although throughout his life Misra has been an abundant mother to him, Askar still lacks his genealogy. Therefore, as his name suggests, he can only be the defender of his autonomy, which is a challenging task for him. Farah underlines Askar's obsession with self-autonomy triggered by his being an orphan in his claim that he was present at his birth. Otherwise he could not have *been*. Farah allegorizes an individual's "falling from the lap of his mother" in order to *be*.

Both in *Midnight's Children* and in *Maps*, the operation of “ideologemes” has been allegorically used “to mediate between conceptions of ideology as abstract opinion [...] and the narrative materials”(Jameson 1982: 87), so that a space can be opened up for the possibility of reappropriating identification. Mary Pereira’s lullaby to baby Saleem, who is not in fact the real son of the Sinais, is the ideological imposition of the powerful subject. Saleem’s “powerful subjectivity” is based on his *authentic* nationality he has acquired as his birthright, which is pathetically fragmented by his real parentage. Similarly, Askar’s violence against Misra by adopting another identifier manifests ideological violence against the Other in the name of self-identification.

All these operations of ideologemes and criticisms to huge claims gradually culminate in both novels, overwhelming the main characters to such an extent that finally they are left to confront what they have feared most. On Saleem’s pickle shelf, and in his narrative, too, one last jar or chapter remains empty so that history is reinterpreted after him despite his ceaseless attempt to freeze time by “chutnification” throughout the narrative. Besides, Saleem’s narrative closes upon itself as he is going to die. So like the *Arabian Nights*, his text marks his being. Ironically, he has hankered to construct *the* ultimate meaning, but ended up with the possibility of other interpretations. Likewise, Askar eventually has to acknowledge his only genealogical possibility, which is his name, now deprived of Misra and the firm grounds of the nation while he is inquiring about the concept of national identity. Both books, in this respect, are radically open-ended and include hope at the moment of death, for they suggest the continuous process of reappropriation of self-identity, taking possibility into consideration at the final stroke.

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