

THE POSTCOLONIAL MIGRANT INTELLECTUAL: THE NOVEL AS PUBLIC
INTERVENTION

by

LOPAMUDRA BASU

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New
York.

2004

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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My dissertation “The Postcolonial Migrant Intellectual: The Novel as Public Intervention” studies four literary intellectuals from former British colonies, Salman Rushdie, Bapsi Sidhwa, Buchi Ememcheta and Ngugi wa' Thiong'o. By examining contemporary migrant novelists from nations of decolonized South Asia and Africa in a comparative framework, I focus on the dynamic and symbiotic relationship between the literary form of the novel and events in the public sphere. My goal in this project is to break out of the current impasse in the debate in postcolonial theory, which either celebrates the postcolonial intellectual as performing the political task of resisting Euro- American cultural hegemony or laments the impossibility of voicing this critique in a world where all avenues and forms of protest have been co-opted. I study the postcolonial novel as a specific form of intellectual intervention in the light of this debate.

I argue that the postcolonial novel inherits two distinct literary traditions: European modernism and anti-colonial literature produced during the mid-twentieth century decolonization movements. Although the growth of the English novel is tied

up with the history of imperialism, attention to the history of its consumption in the colonies and to an emphasis on the novel's dialogic form shows that it did not merely perform the ideological work of Empire. In postcolonial contexts, the novel continues the task of criticizing imperialism, religious and ethnic nationalism, and globalization. Cultural representations of nationalism deployed, from the beginning, a feminine iconography for the representation of the nation's geographic and imaginary body. In postcolonial novels, I study the uses of gender in the imaginative construction of national and diasporic communities. I interrogate the symbolic conflation of the nation or immigrant community with the female body. Finally, I argue that the aesthetic of hybridity in the novel provides an alternative space between metropolis and the ex-colony, a space of language and memory, through which writers are able to powerfully expose postcolonial realities and envision possible futures.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor John Brenkman for directing this project from its preliminary stages to its final version. I thank him for his stimulating seminars on Theories of the Novel, which were germinal to the project, as well as for the guidance, encouragement, and spirited discussions, which were invaluable in producing this work. I thank Professor Meena Alexander for her thoughtful feedback and care in reading the manuscript as well as her enthusiasm, motivation, and support at many critical junctures of the project. I thank Professor Peter Hitchcock for his first seminar at the Graduate Center, which first pointed me in the direction of the debate on the postcolonial intellectual. His feedback at various stages of the project has been vital in shaping this work.

I thank the members of the seminar on New Internationalism in 2000- 2001, at the Center for Place, Culture and Politics at CUNY. The feedback I received from Professors Neil Smith, Ella Shohat, Omar Dahbour helped me in refining my analysis. I thank mentors and colleagues at the South Asian Literary Association for their support and guidance, particularly Amritjit Singh, Lavina Shankar, Kamal Verma and P.S. Chauhan. I thank my professors at the University of Delhi, particularly Shirshendu Chakrabarty and A.N. Anwer for their inspiration to begin on this journey.

I am deeply indebted to my family and friends for their unflinching support and faith in my intellectual efforts. I thank my parents Jayasree and Kantilal Bhattacharjee, for nurturing a love of literature from my childhood and their constant encouragement at every stage of my academic life. I thank my grandmother Helen Mukherjee for all her

affection, my sister Jayeeta, my brother in law Rajib Bose, and my niece Sharanya for their support and enthusiasm from across the oceans over many phone calls and e-mails. I am particularly indebted to my parents in law Shila and Sanjit Basu for their visit in 2003, which helped me to complete a large segment of my writing.

I am grateful to many friends who have made my years as a graduate student so memorable. I thank Jung Wan Yu, Pia Mukherjee, Cara Murray, Kate Moss, Kim Engber, Mahwash Shoaib, Nandita Ghosh, Maureen Fadem, Bidisha Banerjee, and Linda Camarasana, for their friendship, intellectual stimulation, and generosity. I thank Anuradha Paul, Murali Balraman, Esha and Sujana Ghosh for their warmth and hospitality.

Finally, I thank my husband Sandeep for his love, friendship, courage, and optimism for ten years. His laughter never failed to renew my spirit.

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Introduction: The Postcolonial Migrant Intellectual

Contested Terms

The 1990s witnessed a proliferation of writings and the gradual institutionalization of postcolonial studies in academic disciplines like English, history and sociology. With the proliferation of publications, there has been an increased visibility of intellectuals from the former colonies of Britain and France in North American academies. The flourishing of this star system of scholarship stimulated a critical debate about this very phenomenon of institutionalization, and with it the changes in the role of the postcolonial intellectual. Along with the inquiry into the various resonances and limitations of the term "postcolonial" itself, one of the most debated and persistently addressed question in the field has been about the role and efficacy of intellectual migrancy.

Before mapping the main currents of the debate, I would like to clarify some of the ramifications of my dissertation title—"The Postcolonial Migrant Intellectual." In fact each of the three terms that I use to describe my project are highly contested. The term postcolonial has been the object of a lot of criticism. Due to the term's non-specificity, societies with very different histories and structures are put under the postcolonial umbrella. The term postcolonial suggests the end of colonial domination and a definitive break from it, when economic realities indicate the onset and continuance of neocolonialism and the substitution of a more insidious economic control by corporate power for an earlier administrative and political subjugation. The

term postcolonial has also been criticized for its impulse to cluster disparate histories under the master trope of the colonial/ postcolonial. Nineteenth century independence movements in South America, have been thrust together with twentieth century decolonization struggles in Africa and Asia, leaving as ambiguous questions such as “When does the postcolonial begin, and when if ever does it end?” Can the rise of new ethnic nationalisms in the Balkans be studied or explained even partially by theories of the postcolonial? Can the marginalization of tribal and indigenous populations in the first world (Native Americans, Maoris) and in the third world (Santhals in India) be analyzed from the framework of the colonial/postcolonial? Also can the contemporary predicaments of white settler colonies like Canada and Australia be grouped under the trope of the postcolonial? The problem with the term postcolonial seems to be that it has mushroomed into an amorphous and loosely connected mass of political agendas, often disparate and contradictory.

The postcolonial seems to have replaced the earlier term third world in current critical vocabulary. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have argued that the term postcolonial unlike “third world” lacks a program of emancipatory action. They seem to privilege the term third world over postcolonial, because the origin of the term third world as an act of resistance against imperialism in the Bandung conference. On the other hand, the term postcolonial seems for Shohat to be a product of the theoretical era of posts—connected intellectually to movements like postmodernism and poststructuralism in the American academy. Shohat interprets these theoretical movements to be confining theory to the arena of the textual practice—the endless play of signifiers, which parallels the migrations and hybrid cultural interactions of

intellectuals. While they are accurate in their critique of the lack of specificity in the term postcolonial and its homogenization of diverse histories of different regions and the colonizing powers and the colonized under a single term of “postcolonial,” which contradicts sharply with neocolonial realities, I think their rejection of the term postcolonial because of its origins in postmodernism and poststructuralism is predicated upon an interpretation of these movements as only intellectual and politically neutral. Whatever their current appropriations in the American academy may suggest, these intellectual movements originated in a specific context of political resistance in Paris in 1968. Also poststructuralist thinkers like Foucault and Derrida produced their work against the backdrop of France’s involvement with a long and bloody colonial war in Algeria. The critique of the Enlightenment and the project of modernity can be seen to have evolved at least partly from the French experience in Algeria. Postmodernism’s rejection of grand narratives has the liberatory potential of opening up local narratives, which resist the former master tropes of knowledge. Similarly interpreting deconstruction as mere textual play and an endless deferral of meaning is to ignore the polemical thrust embedded in a project, which exposes the logocentric bias in the classic texts of western civilization. Andreas Huyssen points out that postmodernism is not a monolithic discourse and contains within it trends of political dissidence and conformity. While acknowledging Habermas’ critique of Foucault and Derrida for abandoning the project of modernity, Huyssen ends his essay “Mapping the Postmodern” by pointing out some of the positive gains of postmodernism, mainly in the form of the growth of women’s narratives, the growth of an environmental consciousness, and the awareness that, from its inception,

modernity has been intertwined with the fact of imperialism. He concludes his essay with the open-ended statement "No matter how troubling it may be, the landscape of the postmodern surrounds us. It simultaneously delimits and opens our horizons. It's our problem and our hope"(Huysse 271). Shohat and Stam, like other theorists suspicious of the postcolonial, do not sufficiently explore the political implications of the intellectual movements like postmodernism and poststructuralism.

Shohat and Stam prefer the terms post-independence and third world to the ambiguities of the term postcolonial. While their choice of the term post-independence does not collapse the categories of the colonizer/colonized, it does not emphasize the partial nature of decolonization, even at the political level, with regard to the indigenous populations living in the independent countries. The term neocolonial will not satisfactorily express the realities of internal colonization, either. The term third world may have been conceived of as a term of resistance and solidarity, but it seems to have become anachronistic and inaccurate with the disappearance of the second world. Also in popular usage, the term has been stripped off its radical energy and is more often suggestive of a global hierarchy, with the inevitable inferiority implied by an imaginary assignment of a numerical grade based on economic power. I use the term postcolonial in a rather narrow and specific sense. I use the term to discuss the predicament of countries, which achieved independence from European colonization in roughly the middle of the twentieth century. I consider the literature and theory produced in the aftermath of independence as postcolonial. However, I do not limit the postcolonial cultural movements to those occurring in only in a transnational context. In other words, cultural productions within the

boundaries of the independent nations, and resistance movements occurring within the nation state after political independence will be considered as much a part of postcolonial as those movements occurring in migrant communities in metropolitan locations of the first world. I shall be doing this because I do not see the nation state and the diasporic community as being completely separate and unrelated entities. Leela Gandhi's *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, exemplifies this mode of analysis. After a critical evaluation of Said, Bhabha and others, Gandhi creates a new binary, that of the postcolonial and the nationalist. In this formulation the postcolonial represents the metropolitan, the hybrid, the migrant, which Gandhi interprets as a canon forming discourse of European language literature of non-European subject matter, with the romanticization of the figure of the migrant writer and a limiting of the possibility of resistance to mere textual practice. Against this, Gandhi juxtaposes, the nationalist, which is seen as more connected with grassroots reality, more politically engaged, less influenced by the hegemony of European languages and a truer repository of resistance. The reasons for my rejection of this binary formulation are several. We are increasingly encountering a homogenized global space, where metropolitan culture has invaded urban centers of decolonized countries. So the strict separation of cultural spheres is very hard to sustain. Cultural hierarchies, canon forming discourses, and the marginalization of non-elite languages and cultures are as much a reality in nation states as in metropolitan centers. This is not to suggest that I subscribe to the prevailing current of studies in globalization and culture, which confidently declare the death of the nation state. In fact, as Stuart Hall suggests, the global and the local are more sharply in negotiation with each other, in

every particular instance of the local, than ever before, and this makes it imperative not to cast national and postcolonial culture as competitive spaces of culture. Issues of transnational capital's formation of elites, exploitation of female labor, marginalization of indigenous cultures, and ravages on the environment are common factors in the struggle for existence, for mass migrants in the first world as well as citizens of decolonized countries. The specific conditions may differ, but it is important to develop solidarities and stop thinking in terms of exclusive and competitive claims for the authenticity of the postcolonial predicament.

I see connections between resistance movements which originated in nation states and then flowed outwards into the hearts of colonizing centers because of a shared history of colonial domination, economic and cultural subjugation, and racism. The origins of nationalist consciousness often emerged in transnational contexts, for example both Gandhi and Fanon developed their philosophies of anti-colonial resistance, when they lived away from their nations of origin, South Africa in the case of Gandhi and Algeria in the case of Fanon. Therefore it is somewhat limited and arbitrary to try to make absolute geographic distinctions between the national and diasporic communities. I would include both predicaments under the postcolonial, because the histories of the growth of the nation-states and the mushrooming of communities of the ex-colonized, in Britain and France, are simultaneous and parallel developments.

In spite of my response to the term Third World as obsolete, I may slip into its usage, and if it recalls a former ideal of solidarity, perhaps with a touch of nostalgia, I am not uncomfortable in using it, for that very resonance in the term. This

tentativeness in the choice of my vocabulary suggests the importance of ongoing critical scrutiny within the field, and perhaps the non-availability of precise and accurate language for all the nuances of the colonial experience and its aftermath. Thus, I will heed Shohat and Stam's injunction to use these terms in a "differential, contingent and relational manner"(41), without necessarily approving their particular choices in critical vocabulary.

The second term in my dissertation title, which requires a critical definition, is the term "migrant." Edward Said in his article "Reflections on Exile" distinguishes between the terms "Exile" "Expatriate" and "Immigrant." In discussing the work of V.S. Naipaul, Rob Nixon points out Naipaul's deliberate self-fashioning as an exile tracing his literary antecedent in figure of Joseph Conrad and the high modernist aesthetic of alienation and homelessness.

Writers domiciled overseas, regardless of the circumstances of their removal from their native lands, commonly imagine and describe themselves as living in exile because it is a term privileged by high modernism and associated with the emergence of the metropolis as a crucible for a more international, though still European- or more American based culture. The phrase *in exile* resonates with a sophisticated anxiety that fits tidily with a certain conventional perception of the writer's lot in society. By choosing exile over the bland and anonymous immigrant, and the all too comfortable expatriate, and the even more hedonistic- sounding cosmopolitan,

Naipaul can trumpet his alienation while implicitly drawing on a secure, reputable tradition of extratraditionalism (25).

While Nixon criticizes the appropriation of the term exile because of its cultural prestige and canonical literary antecedents, (James Joyce, Hemingway, Conrad, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Beckett, to name a few) Said is more sensitive to the multiple associations of loss, dispossession, and trauma among social groups uprooted because of exile, as well as political censorship, imprisonment imposed on writers by various regimes, Said begins his essay "Reflections on Exile" by emphasizing the distinctions between twentieth century experiences of mass evictions and exile from the voluntary exile of high modernist practitioners.

You must first set aside Joyce and Nabakov and think instead of the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created. You must think of the refugee—peasants with no prospect of ever returning home, armed only with a ration card and an agency number. Paris may be a capital famous for cosmopolitan exiles, but it is also a city where unknown men and women have spent years of miserable loneliness: Vietnamese, Algerians, Cambodians, Lebanese, Senegalese, Peruvians. You must think also of Cairo, Beirut, Madagascar, Bangkok, Mexico City. As you move further from the Atlantic world, the awful forlorn waste increases: the hopelessly large numbers, the compounded miseries of 'undocumented' people suddenly lost, without a tellable history.

However, despite the distinction between the solitary experience of the exiled intellectual and the collective experience of communities of political refugees and the warning not to fetishize the experience of exile, Said does gradually return to a valorization of modernist intellectuals in exile like Adorno and Erich Auerbach. Although the essay alludes to the inherent dangers of political and ethnic extremism that shapes the condition of exile, it ends by celebrating exile as “nomadic, decentred and contrapuntal” (172). Although attempting to distinguish between the experience of exile of the modernist intellectual and the stark brutality of the condition of political refugees, the suffering of the refugee gets somewhat elided, in the foregrounding of the adversarial potential of the exilic intellectual.

I will in general avoid the term exile in my discussions of the postcolonial intellectual, because of the term’s capacity for appropriating and conflating experiences of forceful eviction from a place of origin with the voluntary choice of such a displacement, as well as the blurring of the distinctions between intellectuals in exile and mass refugees. Although it can be argued that modernist intellectuals like Auerbach and Adorno fled political repression, many postcolonial writers like Naipaul and Rushdie have left their homelands, not because their very survival was contingent on it, but because they were able to exercise a measure of choice in opting to travel and live in places where their intellectual efforts were more likely to flourish. In the case of Ngugi, it would be more appropriate to describe his situation as that of an exile since he has not been able to return to Kenya, because of the repressive political climate there. The distinction between an exile and migrant seems

to be more dependent on the feasibility of return than the exact conditions, which prompted the departure.

Also, I do not view high modernism as the only intellectual lineage of postcolonial writers. I would like to connect the works of postcolonial writers with this intellectual legacy as well as with the phenomenon of twentieth century immigration. I use the term migrant over immigrant, because the word migrant lacks the sense of finality implied in the word immigrant, and contains the possibility of multiple alliances and even a return to the postcolonial nation from which the migration took place. The word migrant does not carry the associations of modernist alienation, homelessness, angst, experiences of a privileged and canonized literary minority, which have been universalized as the existential condition of modernity.

Finally, a brief note on the term intellectual before I return to the contemporary debate surrounding the postcolonial intellectual. George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi in their book *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, reveal the hiatus between two prevailing conceptions of intellectuals, one "which treats as an intellectual anyone having a defined store of knowledge and engaged in one of a number of defined occupations" (24) and the other view which distinguishes as true intellectuals those "who formulate ideas which unconditionally and critically transcend the existing order" (8). In the second conception, the intellectual is dissociated from a social class and the term becomes "a badge of distinction which individual intellectuals confer on one another . . . a moralizing patent of nobility which at the same time, cunningly removes the products of 'true' intellectual effort *a priori* from the purview of any critical sociology of knowledge"(8). Certainly my use

of the term “intellectual” is not in the first generalized sense of anyone possessing technical knowledge. I am using the term intellectuals for literary intellectuals, theorists and creative writers. However, by juxtaposing the migration of literary intellectuals with the migration of engineers and scientists in studying a South Asian novel of migration like Bapsi Sidhwa’s *An American Brat*, I try to avoid the danger of attributing a transcendent ahistorical value to literary intellectuals, and judge them within the context of a “critical sociology of knowledge.” My work focuses on literary intellectuals, theorists and novelists, and as a shorthand I will be referring to them as intellectuals.

Debate About Intellectual Migrancy

The debate about the postcolonial migrant intellectual can be seen as a polarization between what can be described broadly as Postmodern and Marxist positions. Edward Said sees postcolonial migrancy as a second phase of the mid-twentieth century decolonization movements. In this phase postcolonial migrant intellectuals constitute an anti-imperialist group who resist imperial forces in a globalized world not from national boundaries but from metropolitan locations. Said's conception of the postcolonial intellectual is that of one who participates in “adversarial internationalization”(*Culture and Imperialism* 244).

Said views nationalism as one of the aspects of resistance to imperialism but “not the most interesting or enduring one”(266). Acknowledging the limits of Marxist and Nationalist theories ¹(266-279), in resisting imperialism, Said locates

¹ Said is referring here to the blindness of the Frankfurt School of Marxism, towards specifically imperial issues as well as the limits of nationalist thinkers like Cabral and Gandhi, towards the

resistance in the aftermath of decolonization, not in established institutions or doctrines, but in “nomadic, migratory and anti-narrative energy” (279). In Said's conceptualization, then, resistance to imperialism gets crystallized in the figure of the postcolonial migrant intellectual who directs “unhoused decentered and exilic energies”(332) against imperialist forces.

Said's position on the migrant intellectual has found support and extension in Homi Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity as that which results “when the interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up” and which “entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy”(*Locations of Culture* 4). For Bhabha too, the cultural politics of hybridity emerges as a result of “postcolonial migration, the narrative of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees” (5). In both these theorists, there seems to be a certain lack of reflexivity in their own position of privilege and its impact on their theoretical formulations. Also, in the privileging of the migrant postcolonial intellectual, there seems to be an erasure of the grassroots movements in postcolonial societies which are popular, mass based, and have as much claim for being considered the second phase of anti-imperialist struggle as works of migrant intellectuals. Eco-feminist movements like the resistance to the Narmada Valley Project in India comprise one strain of grassroots resistance against bourgeois nationalist agendas of industrialism and modernization.

problems in these countries after decolonization. Said's contention is that nationalism as a polar opposite of colonialism, is inadequate to conquer the more pervasive influence of imperialism. However in his attempt to present the model of the “exilic” intellectual as the new locus of anti-imperialist struggle, there seems to be an erasure of historical specificities of particular decolonized

Marxist critics like Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik, on the other hand, refuse the valorization of the postcolonial migrant intellectual and disclaim real radical possibilities of such migrant cultural politics. They are not optimistic about the institutionalization of postcolonial intellectual productions. Ahmad in particular is very critical of Said's humanistic celebration of the intellectual whom he sees not as adversarial to imperial power centers, but as motivated by the desire to occupy the same centers of power and privilege. Dirlik opines in his essay "The Post Colonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," that postcolonialism, like Confucianism, has been incorporated into the capitalist ideology because global capitalism requires cultural negotiations with the third world. He is also critical of the lack of any program of emancipation on the part of the migrant intellectuals and argues that notions like hybridity, as opposed to fixed identity, fail to take into account asymmetries of cultural exchanges.² Notions like hybridity of cultural productions are not seen as emancipatory or challenging imperialism in any substantive way, but reducing politics to mere textual play, which preserves the implicit hierarchies of cultures. Thus in this conceptualization the postcolonial intellectual is seen as someone who has been co-opted by the power centers of the first world, incapable of offering any resistance to the domination of multi-national

predicaments, and a generalized grouping of all nationalist thinkers as harbingers of bourgeois nationalism. See *Culture and Imperialism* (266-279).

² Of particular relevance here is Dipesh Chakrabarty's notion of "asymmetrical ignorance," in his essay "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History." This essay draws attention to the fact that South Asian historians have to be aware of all the particularities of Western historiographic practices, whereas in western discussions of South Asian cultural productions, there is no reciprocal specificity of knowledge of South Asian cultural references. Chakrabarty uses Linda Hutcheon's discussion of Salman Rushdie's novels to demonstrate this.

capital. The Marxist theorists thus negate the possibility of any intervention on the part of the postcolonial migrant intellectuals.

This debate about the efficacy versus the commodification of intellectual work, stems from the fundamental contradiction ingrained in the very notion of the intellectual as a social and philosophical category, and this is the split between their professional roles and their vocations of being critics of the very institutions they inhabit. Bruce Robbins in the opening chapter of his book, *Secular Vocations*, draws attention to the emerging discussion on the social perception of intellectuals. Robbins points to the growth in the mass perception of the intellectual as someone who had become transformed from the category of the “*luftmenshen*” to the professional academic. Robbins deconstructs the notion of the intellectual as “*luftmenshen*” or airmen by pointing out the institutional locations of writers, before they became professional academics. Thus, intellectuals have always embodied this contradiction between institutional affiliation, and the necessity for non-affiliation, distance and non-rootedness to enable socio-cultural critique. In the case of postcolonial intellectuals this basic contradiction is compounded further by the dual locational affiliations of these intellectuals—the academic institutions they inhabit in the metropolitan centers and their cultural allegiances to the nation-states of their origin.

The postcolonial intellectual can be said to have inherited at least two traditions of intellectual activity. The first of these is the tradition of the modernist avant-garde. Many postcolonial writers like Naipaul and Rushdie trace their literary lineage back to high modernist writers like Conrad, Joyce and Eliot, who proclaimed

a primary allegiance to their art and vocation over any loyalty to a nation or community. The modernist movement cannot be generalized into any essentialist ethos; it represented a wide canvass of political and aesthetic engagements from an alienation and disenchantment with industrial capitalism to a commitment to revolutionary social change. In the case of some modernists, the disenchantment with modernity resulted in a regression into pre-modern cultures, organic societies and the cult of myth, ritual and religion. Thus modernist art and literature ranges from the left wing Surrealism of Andre Breton and the virtual inseparability of political commitment and aesthetic innovation in Picasso's *La Guernica* to the political subtext below the literary inventiveness of Joyce's *Ulysses* to the opposite swing where disillusionment with industrialism and democracy leads to an obsession with pre-modern hierarchical societies, the recuperation of myths and blood ritual in the Lawrence of *The Plumed Serpent*.

Although, the most obvious literary antecedent of migrant postcolonial intellectuals seem to have been the high modernists, and this is often the lineage that Naipaul and others strive to emphasize, this is not the most important tradition of intellectual influence that these writers draw from. Postcolonial intellectuals share the legacy of anti-colonial resistance and writing produced in the context of decolonization movements. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt in their introduction to *Postcolonial Theory and the United States* have traced the antecedents of contemporary postcolonial theory to anti-colonial thinkers like C.L.R. James, Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, writers of the negritude movement like Leopold Senghor, Aime Cesaire, and African American activists like W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey.

Thus, C.L.R. James, Aime Cesaire, Leopold Senghor, Mahatma Gandhi, Frantz Fanon are in a sense predecessors of postcolonial intellectuals.

The narrative of the intellectual's involvement in the struggle for political independence is not a celebratory one. The history of decolonization movements bear testimony to the fact of the gradual narrowing down of the larger, more inclusive nationalist project into the bourgeois revolution. Sumit Sarkar's study of popular insurgency reveals how masses were mobilized; Gandhian revolutionary practices like civil disobedience had a long precedence in tribal and subaltern history and were appropriated by Gandhi. Both Sumit Sarkar in *Popular Movements and Middle Class Leadership in Late Colonial India* and Partha Chatterjee in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* point out how these subaltern resistance practices were eventually subsumed by the interests of the bourgeois class, with the gradual expulsion of the hopes of an egalitarian and just nationalism.

In both these traditions of intellectual activity, which I have tried to trace as a kind of genealogy for the postcolonial intellectual, similar contradictions which have emerged in the context of today's debate, may be seen to have been present. Intellectuals who participated in the anti-colonial resistance movements had to negotiate questions of efficacy of political struggle and successful independence with the failure to move beyond just that, in the face of economic, gender, and a myriad other inequalities. The modernist avant garde were protesting against the ills of modern western capitalist society, and its suggestive disintegration in the World Wars, but even the most radical of their artistic expressions faced the risk of commodification and co-optation by the same bourgeois interests that they were

rejecting. Thus intellectuals now, and in the past seem to embody a fundamental contradiction between institutional sanction and approval, and the task of critiquing of social institutions, even the ones they inhabit. In the case of intellectual activists like those who participated in anti-colonial resistance, the basic contradiction seems to have been the gap between immediate political goals, and the larger cause of social transformation.

My response to the incommensurable positions of the Said/ Ahmad debate, the contradiction between adversarial or critical intellectual work and the co-optation of such critique by institutions is that this contradiction is not unique to the particular predicament of postcolonial theorists in the nineties. Intellectuals in other contexts and at other times have embodied and lived through the basic dialectic between efficacy of critique and the limitations to critique because of the locations and institutional and class affiliations of intellectuals. Intellectuals seem to manifest in their works the dialectic between allegiance to their professional institutions and the allegiance to their task of social critique. The heterogeneous mass of intellectuals who constitute academics and novelists occupy a variety of positions within the two opposed poles of allegiances that I have drawn out. For postcolonial intellectuals, this duality is compounded by their hybrid cultural identities, their allegiances to the societies of their origin, and /or the antagonism to regimes in their societies of origin, their present institutional locations in metropolitan academia. While it may be a reductive generalization to group some writers as representative of their allegiance to their national or immigrant communities, and others as non-exemplary, some sharp differences do emerge in the level of engagement with the task of critique. For

example, there is a sharp difference between the celebratory narratives of South Asian immigration to the US and the cultural underpinnings of the phenomenon, in Bharati Mukherjee's novels, and the far more pessimistic portrayal of the predicament of South Asian immigrants in Britain, in the works of Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi. Within the same geographic terrain, a contrast is evident between the savagely critical thrust of Salman Rushdie's novelistic depictions of South Asian immigration, as opposed to V. S. Naipaul's travel writings of the same period, which while being critical of postcolonial predicaments in India and Trinidad, do not subject Thatcherite Britain to any powerful critique. Within the oeuvre of a single author, it may be possible to identify a variety of positions ranging from affirmation of their institutional locations to a critique of imperial centers, within which the works are produced and where they get circulated most widely.

Thus if intellectuals are constantly negotiating the tension between their locations and vocations, the question of efficacy or failure of intellectual activity, defies absolute answers. The answers can only be contingent, and dependent on specific circumstances, offerable only on a case by case basis. I believe in the necessity of trying to think the intellectual in relation to the community. This is not a narcissistic quest of self-validation. as a student who has migrated from India in the 1990s. The possibility of debate, critique, and dialogue are fundamental attributes of any democratic society. These functions are served, partly by intellectuals in the public sphere. These attributes are also not the exclusive legacy of western Enlightenment. Amartya Sen in an article in the *New Republic*, has demonstrated that many proto democratic forms existed in the South Asian ancient and medieval

historical contexts. To Sen's list of democratic attributes in South Asian history, it is possible to add the role of the intellectual as a space of democratic activity. In fourth century B.C. Chanakya, a learned Brahman, was a counselor to Chandragupta Maurya, and helped him to overthrow the despotic Nanda dynasty and establish his own rule. His treatise *Arthshastra*, advice to the king on political economy, implicitly privileges the role of the intellectual in steering the polity towards justice. Thus the Platonic model of the philosopher/king is not the only available ancient model to highlight the need for an intellectual. It is true that ancient conceptions of the intellectual were necessarily elitist. But the point I want to emphasize is that intellectual activity has been acknowledged as crucially important in the functioning of any society of justice and relative freedom. This is not the monopoly of western Enlightenment. M. Fischer and Abedi in their reading of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, in the article "Bombay Talkies," emphasize the tradition of debate, inquiry, and critique in the context of Islamic societies, where authoritarianism and submission to the scriptures is assumed too easily to have always been a norm. In fact, the refusal to accept critique, debate, and discussion has been more of a trend of the late twentieth century, with the growth of religious conservatisms, across the globe. Talal Asad's analysis of the same controversy examines the appropriation of western forms of protest by Bradford Muslims, by the democratic articulation of the demand for the censorship of the novel, as an extension of existing blasphemy laws in Britain into the purview of immigrant religions like Islam. The book burnings are interpreted by Asad to be an angry protest against the racist and xenophobic religious double standards in Britain.

The growth of narrow and intolerant religious fundamentalisms and the prevalence of a homogeneous global culture can be viewed as the twin faces of late twentieth century global socio-cultural scene. The end of the Cold War, the prevalence of mass culture proliferating with images of consumerism, seems to have superficially united a world under the banner of Benetton advertisement, but it has not been able to elide the deep divisions based on class, ethnicity, race, religion and gender. The mushrooming of religious and ethnic conservatisms all over the world seems almost like a backlash against the aggressive homogenization of cultural space by global capital. Often the most detrimental effects of this are registered by third world women. In the polarization of most cultural articulations in the world as a valorization of global capitalism on the one hand, or a virulent protest against it in the form of a regression to ruthless fundamentalist regimes, on the other, it is more important than ever to reconceptualize the intellectual as someone who can provide other alternative positions of analysis and critique.

Within the United States, the draining of resources from higher education at a time of economic prosperity in the 1990s spoke of the concerted efforts to cripple institutions, which can serve as alternatives to the corporatization of human thought. The attack on higher education as a space of intellectual activity is not limited to centers of capitalist power. In Kenya, intellectual activity has been repressed by the machinations of a neocolonial state, by the imprisonment, exile, and execution of writers and educators, by the censorship of books as well as popular theatrical performances. In India, various forms of censorship have infringed on intellectual freedoms, and higher education has been systematically starved of economic

resources, while more and more funds of the national budget has been directed to defense, in the name of the ever-present danger (real or imagined) of yet another war with Pakistan. The cauldron of Kashmir has been kept simmering, and used repeatedly to draw political mileage, on both sides of the subcontinent. The rhetoric of religious nationalism, the paranoia of nuclear armament capability, and the excuse of deterrence, have been invoked time and again to elicit popular consent for defense spending. Arundhati Roy's impassioned condemnation of the nuclear tests, in a popular Indian magazine, evoked hostile responses, particularly from political quarters, providing yet another example of the increasing intolerance of dissent, which is a requisite in every democratic society.

In the US, following the attacks on the World Trade Center in NYC, there has been a tremendous backlash against civil liberties of immigrants from Muslim countries, implemented through the provisions of the Patriot Act. This phenomenon has been felt not only by mass migrants, but its repercussions have been felt acutely by intellectuals and public figures. The most striking examples of the curtailment of freedoms of expression were seen in the attacks against Bill Maher for expressing the unconventional opinion about terrorists and the question of courage, leading to the cancellation of Maher's *Politically Incorrect* show. In a similar vein Susan Sontag was attacked for expressing similar views, and felt compelled to retract her original statement and issue an apology.

Lest we dismiss these instances as examples of hyper-emotionalism by a public reeling from an unprecedented tragedy, the recent attempts by Congress which have resulted in the passage of legislation to regulate Title VI federal funds, by the

institution of an Advisory Board, which will dictate terms to universities accepting Title VI funding for Area Studies Programs demonstrates that spaces for intellectual activity are more in a state of siege than ever. In the events leading to the passage of this legislation there was an aggressive campaign against Edward Said and the field of Postcolonial Studies for its alleged "Anti-Americanism," and an articulation of a need to make area studies programs serviceable for the task of homeland security.³

It is in the context of these developments which blur the notions of metropolitan postcolonial free speech and third world censorship, it is more important than ever to articulate the need for intellectuals and spaces of intellectual activity in all societies. Part of the anti-intellectual climate in the US and India stem from the mass perception of intellectuals as privileged hypocrites, espousing causes of social transformation, and ultimately betraying these egalitarian hopes. This widely prevailing perception of the intellectual is perhaps the natural consequence of the failures of Communism and anti-colonial independence struggles. To this has been added the Manichean ideology of US nationalism in a post 9/11 world. By this I am referring to the black and white rhetoric of the current wave of US nationalism in which there can be only two alternatives American patriotism or anti-Americanism, which translates to support of terrorism, in this reductive logic. This Manichean conception of world politics heightens the dominant perception of intellectuals, particularly those in academia, as being a professional group who are privileged, out of touch with political realities on the ground, "tenured radicals," residual figures from 1960s and 1970s Civil Rights and anti-war movements.

³ For an impassioned response to Title VI legislation see Alisa Solomon's piece "The Ideology Police", in the Feb 25 2004 issue of the *Village Voice*

The attack on civil liberties, surveillance of academic programs and researchers, comes in the wake of attempts to restructure US universities. Masao Miyoshi in his essay "Sites of Resistance in the Global Economy," describes the phenomenon of the restructuring of the university along the lines of a TNC (transnational corporation) into a "multiversity." Edward Said in the President's column of the *MLA Newsletter* of Spring 1999, pointed out that "while humanists are turned into part-time wage earners, a deepening alliance between the research university (its management programs, science departments, boards of trustees, etc.) and the corporate world has developed." Said goes on to mention that "there is a remarkable quiescence among humanists and social scientists as they watch the transformation of the university into a place where defense industries, biomedical conglomerates, and agricultural businesses gain strength at the expense of the more traditional intellectual disciplines."

While analyzing the crisis in higher education, all the scholars I have been alluding to call for ways by which the distance between intellectuals and their publics can be bridged. Miyoshi identifies the root of the problem in "the abandonment of, and indifference to the wretched of the earth" which "fractures the credibility of the intellectual enterprise" (62). This abandonment manifests itself in the cult of "gibberish," a term Miyoshi uses to describe the obscure, exclusive and limited vocabulary of academic theoretical discourse. His method of countering these trends is "to disturb exclusivism . . . thereby expose globalism for its exclusivism" (63) in order to ensure the survival of higher education. Said had called for a "reinforced sense of intellectual responsibility" instead of a heightened professionalism. In

addition to the project of exposing the elitism of globalism, Miyoshi identifies a few other vectors around which resistance can arise. Neil Lazarus in "Transnationalism and the Alleged Death of the Nation State" argues the nation is a "terrain on which an articulation between secular intellectualism and popular consciousness can be forged" and that "in an era of transnational capitalism it is on the basis of such a universalistic articulation—that is on the basis of nationalatarian struggle—that it is possible to imagine a postcapitalist world" (46). Although fully aware of the inadequacies of the nation state, Miyoshi concedes that "our distrust for the state is outweighed now by the need for administrative mediation between people and flexible capital between people and chaos. The state is the only political structure now that could protect people from ungovernable disorder/unmediated violence"(55). Miyoshi also identifies other vectors of resistance, such as more powerful interstate organizations like the UN, transnational unionization of world labor, environmental activism, and academic activism. Neil Lazarus and Masao Miyoshi's conceptualization of the role of the nation state is in sharp contrast to Arjun Appadurai's theorization of transnationalism in *Modernity at Large*. Appadurai subscribes to the theory that in the post Cold War period the legitimacy of nation states has weakened. While Appadurai's claim that "One major fact that accounts for strains in the union of nation and state is that the nationalist genie, never perfectly contained in the bottle of the territorial state is now itself diasporic," may be accurate, he goes on to infer "that we are in the process of moving to a global order in which the nation state has become obsolete and other formations for allegiance and identity have taken place"(169). I think Appadurai's formulations about the "emergent postnational order" are somewhat premature.

Multinational capitalism advances and consolidates itself through interstices of nation-states. Free trade zones, NAFTA, do not operate in a stateless world. Therefore, although attempts to resist globalization have emerged as transnational alliances of activists, nation states can and should be mobilized as one of the vectors for the control of the unbridled sway of global capitalism. Nation states are signatories to free trade agreements. They can resist the dictates of organizations like the World Trade Organization in programs of economic restructuring and can hold corporations accountable for economic justice. However nation states need to do this by entering into a transnational imaginary, and not through a myopic vision of only securing economic justice within the borders of advanced capitalist nations.

In mapping out the various possibilities of intellectual activism, I do not want to reinvoké the notion of the Gramscian organic intellectual, uncritically. Nor do I want to romanticize the activist project, as the simple alternative to exclusionary discourses of academia. If theorists and novelists face the danger of commodification of their intellectual productions, activism is not a pristine arena, unpermeated by global capital. Ananya Bhattacharjee's thought provoking reflections on the splintering of Sakhi, a South Asian organization for domestic violence in New York City, reveals how Sakhi's activist concerns could not accommodate the agendas of the illegal domestic workers, seeking economic justice against exploitation by community elites, who comprised Sakhi's Board of Directors. Thus activists, whose works do not seem to be subject to market forces, have to be subservient to the class interests of patrons, which often diminish the egalitarian thrust of the projects. Non-

profit organizations have to often negotiate the hurdles of inefficiency and corruption, in their work in postcolonial states.

The other really serious danger in the activist project is the conflation of the subjectivity of the intellectual with that of the subaltern. Spivak's work constantly draws attention to the dangers of narcissistic self-glory, embedded in the activist project. In her reading of *Jane Eyre*, in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" Spivak points to the creation of the subjectivity of the western female, predicated on the vocation of activism, which in the colonial context is the vocation of bringing the light of civilization to the colonized woman, in the form of missionary work. This would have been Jane's vocation if she had left for India, and her vocation of domesticity has to be paved by the symbolic burning of the Creole Bertha Mason, Rochester's first wife. This death by burning is read by Spivak to be a symbolic evocation of Sati, the Hindu widow sacrifice, which enabled the life choice of the missionary for the western female intellectual. Spivak sees a parallel between nineteenth century colonialist administrators' appropriation of the vocabulary of saving "brown women" and the contemporary "epistemic violence" in the appropriation of contemporary subaltern experiences by intellectuals like Foucault and Deleuze for the validation of their own vocations. Spivak's suspicion of the activist project leads her to the injunction to consign the subaltern to the blank space of silence, rather than seek to represent the subaltern. Spivak's 1985 essay can be interpreted as a salutary reminder to the dangers inherent in the activist project, especially in the context of the hegemonic rise of western feminism in the American academia with its tendency to universalize all particularities. Of course, it is not

possible to stop and accept the space of blank silence of the subaltern forever. However, difficult or dangerous, the subaltern must form alliances and coalitions and seek to emancipate herself.

Among postcolonial intellectuals, there are several varied modes of resistance and attempts to reconnect the intellectual with the masses. Ngugi wa Thiongo offers a model of resistance in his latest theoretical work—*Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*, in which he argues that the gap between the African intellectual and the community arises from a gap between European and African languages. His mode of rectifying this situation involves the return of the intellectual to the language of her community. He uses the Platonic Allegory of the Cave to signify the gap in the conceptual world of the intellectuals and those they must speak to. His own efforts to return to the linguistic world of his community takes the form of writing most of his later fiction in his native language—Gikuyu, editing a journal of Gikuyu fiction and other activities. However this seems to me to be a partial solution. In India, such a program of return to native language in Bengal, by the abolition of English as a subject at the elementary school level, has not bridged the gap between the intellectual and community. If anything, it has limited access to a language of power (English) to students of poorer socio-economic groups, while continuing to enhance the power of the middle class who can sidestep this government initiative by sending their children to private schools using English as the medium of instruction. Ngugi's program makes language the primary culprit in the separation of the intellectual from the community, when class seems to be the more obvious factor.

The second model of activism, is offered in the example of pedagogic activism by a diasporic intellectual like Stuart Hall in his role in the creation of the field of cultural studies. Although Hall remains confined to the academy and does not advocate cultural activism in the model of Ngugi's return to native African languages or the creation of spaces of cultural dissidence in the neocolonial state, through the organization of a popular African theater movement, his intervention takes the form of the non-routine, non-familiar and the non-traditional entering the academic enclave, and becoming the object of serious inquiry. Thus pedagogic reform is yet another mode of intervention to reverse the exclusivity of the contemporary university.

The most obvious model of a postcolonial intellectual's intervention and connection through his intervention with his imagined community, is Edward Said's involvement in the cause of Palestinian liberation. The history of Said's involvement with the Palestine cause suggests the complexities of such interventions. From an espousal of Arafat's political position, Said moved to a repudiation of Arafat, and finally to the suggestion of an Israeli state with dual citizenship, instead of an autonomous Palestinian state. In a recent obituary of Said, Gauri Vishwanathan describes his political activism and scholarship towards the end of his life. Drawing from the memories of her long association with Said, Vishwanathan writes:

A conference at Columbia last Spring to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the publication of *Orientalism* culminated in a passionate and eloquent talk by Edward on the Iraq war, the illegitimacy and venality of which demonstrated, only too tragically and ironically that

Orientalism continued to rule the West's relationship to the Middle East and Islam . . . In his last days he grieved openly for Palestine and urged us his comrades and fellows in spirit, to continue the struggle against injustice and oppression.

Said's example illustrates more clearly than any other the contradictions between the intellectual's commitment to his primary task of critique, and his affiliation with the institutions he is located in, or the alliances he identifies with, culturally. But Said's example demonstrates most aptly the fusion of scholarly, theoretical project with that of the political activism of an intellectual in public life.

Finally, we have the model of strategic alliance or coalitions which intellectuals and novelists, or theorists and activists can form. This is suggested by the collaborative endeavors of Mahasweta Devi and Gayatri Spivak. Mahasweta Devi writes about the experiences of tribal populations in Bengal and Bihar, in her fiction as well as in her journalistic works. She conceives of her role as an activist, not as missionary saving the tribals from the economic or spiritual miseries of their lives but as a channel of information between them and various governmental and non-governmental agencies. The thrust in Devi's activist writings is to campaign for the recognition of the tribals to decide on their own modes of development and survival, instead of having such plans imposed imperiously on them. In "Unorganized Rural Labour" Devi writes:

My earnest plea to the central government is, if you really want to 'help the poor' then please recognize these *samitis* (committees) . . .
No government machinery can achieve what these grassroots-level

organizations can. They know what they need, what they can handle, and how to go about it. With a few fruit trees, some goats, duck or poultry, fish tanks and cottage industries, the poor will be able to survive (161).

This model of the activist project tries consciously to reverse the power asymmetries between the intellectual and the subaltern, not by a false conflation of the two, but by limiting the role of the activist to a communicator in a public forum. Spivak's role in this can be seen as a translator of Devi's fiction who expands the scope of this communication, further. Thus the Devi/ Spivak alliance can serve as an example of successful collaboration between theory and activism, cultural criticism and fiction writing. Instead of emphasizing the exclusive territories of each of these activities, this alliance is suggestive of the dependence of each of these functions of the intellectual in the overall task of rethinking solutions and alternatives to existing problems, and initiating these processes.

The Novel and Politics

Having outlined models of intellectual activity which traverse and synthesize the categories of theory, literature and activism, I now return to the specific focus of the following chapters, the postcolonial novel and the rationale for this project.

This work has been designed to study the postcolonial novel as a specific form of intellectual intervention, in response to the theoretical debate about the migrant intellectual that emerged in the 1990s. The central problem with which I began this chapter will be re-examined in the following chapters when the question of the

intellectual will be taken up with respect to the postcolonial novel. The issue I will try to explore now is my rationale for the study of the postcolonial novel.

Before narrowing down my discussion to the specific genre of the novel, I would like to dwell on the broader category of which the novel is a part, the category of literature and art. The question of literature is tied up with the question of whether literature is a commodity, or whether it occupies a space separate from the market and how the question of autonomy relates to the political significance of the work. I am influenced by the Frankfurt School theorists as well as Pierre Bourdieu and believe that literary works even in the age of global capital preserve a certain autonomy from the market. Their career in the market does not coincide exactly with the career of material goods. Moreover, by the logic of the aesthetic form they embody, they are separate from the real world though vitally connected to it. However, I believe that postcolonial literature, especially a particular strain of it, obvious most perhaps in my study of Ngugi, draws from a tradition of anti-colonial literature in which the artistic and the political purposes of the work are never at a disjuncture. Nor was the cultural capital of literary works in the anti-colonial tradition ever in an opposed relationship with mass popularity. The novelists I study represent both ends of this spectrum, moving from the position of artistic autonomy espoused by Rushdie to commitment to a political agenda, articulated by Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

The choice of the novel as the object of my study, is an attempt to find an alternative to the theoretical impasse between Marxist and Postmodernist positions of the nineteen nineties with respect to the migrant intellectual. My choice of the study of the postcolonial novel, a literary form, emanates from formulations by theorists of

the Frankfurt School, who in the early part of the twentieth century, in response to modernist art advocated the autonomy of the aesthetic form. Walter Benjamin in "The Author as Producer", Herbert Marcuse in *The Aesthetic Dimension* and Theodor Adorno in "Commitment," have all in different ways privileged art which does not explicitly follow the dictates of any political purpose. These writers wanted to distance themselves from the excesses of art pressed to the service of repressive political systems like Communism or Fascism. Adorno develops a complex argument between the merits of autonomous against committed art, and ultimately privileges autonomy because "The notion of a 'message' in art even when politically radical, already contains an accommodation to the world: the stance of lecturer conceals a clandestine entente with the listeners, who could only be rescued from illusions by refusal of it" ("Commitment" 317).

These theorists made an impassioned argument for an autonomous space for art, so that it could be the repository and expression of potentialities for social transformation, without explicitly furthering a political agenda. However, although privileging the notion of autonomy, Adorno cautions against an art, which loses its connection with society. Any literature, which only exists for itself also "degenerates into ideology no less." ("Commitment" 317). Adorno does not call for a compromise between autonomy and commitment. Instead of explicit correspondences between works of art and political realities, Adorno and others in the Frankfurt School are interested in highlighting the less formulaic, subtle inter-relationships between art and politics.

Pierre Bourdieu in the *Field of Cultural Production* provides a detailed analysis of Flaubert's novels and their relation to the market of economic and symbolic goods. Bourdieu argues that at the time Flaubert was writing, the value ascribed to symbolic goods, like his novels, were not shaped by the laws of the economic market. In fact, success in the economic market was a sign of the literary work's lack of inherent merit, its paucity of "cultural capital." Bourdieu alludes to this paradoxical relationship when he writes "The art game is, in fact, in relation to the business world, a losing game, a game of loser takes all. The real winners are the losers: those who earn money and honors . . . those who achieve worldly success surely jeopardize their chances in the world beyond," (*Field* 154). Bourdieu goes on to argue that Frederic the hero of *Sentimental Education*, represents the modern artist, "a new category invented by the creation of an autonomous artistic field"(155). Bourdieu traces the genesis of the art for art' sake art within the French literary field between 1830s to the 1850s, as a reaction against social art on the one hand and bourgeois art on the other. Flaubert believed ardently in the artist's political neutrality, in the refusal to commit to any political position whether bourgeois or socialist. Bourdieu ends his chapter on Flaubert by tracing Falubert's point of view in his novel:

It is here, in this narrative with no beyond, in this narrative that recounts itself, in the irreconcilable diversity of perspectives, in the universe from which the author has deleted himself but remains, like Spinoza' ghost immanent and co-extensive with his creation--it is here that we find Flaubert's point of view (211).

The question of autonomy of an artistic work, in my analysis, derives from two traditions of thought. First, in Adorno and Marcuse's conception, an artwork by virtue of its form is able to transform reality and give it an alternative space and a life of its own. It is no longer a part of the real world but vitally connected to it, and following only the logic of its form. Marcuse defines aesthetic form as "the result of transformation of a given content (actual, historical, personal or social fact) into a self-contained whole: a poem, play, novel etc. The work is thus 'taken out' of the constant process of reality and assumes a significance and truth of its own"(8). Marcuse goes on to argue that the critical function of art resides in the logic of its aesthetic form. Although the aesthetic form of a literary work distances it from the actuality of class struggle, it is able to offer a "counter-consciousness," which is ultimately liberatory. For Marcuse as well as other theorists of the Frankfurt School, the progressive character of a work of art is not dependent on the class origins of the artist or the representation of the oppressed class in the artist's work. Marcuse argues "The criteria for the progressive character of art are given only in the work itself as a whole: in what it says and how it says it" (19). This is echoed in Walter Benjamin's famous statements in "The Author as Producer," where he states "I should like to show you that the tendency of a literary work can only be politically correct if it is also literarily correct. That is to say that the politically correct tendency includes a literary tendency" ("Author as Producer" 256).

The other aspect of an artwork's autonomy derives from the fact that it does not obey the rules of most commodities in the market place. For example, the market

for literary goods in Flaubert's time was autonomous and distinct from the dictates of the markets for other commodities and goods.

This idea of the autonomy of artistic production is tenable in the context of modernist artistic production. Works of high modernist literature and art were not immediately successful in terms of wide scale readership or sales. These works were involved in a very self-conscious way in refashioning the form of the literary creation. In the case of postcolonial novelists, the gap between cultural and economic capital seems to have been bridged to a great extent. Not only have novelists like Salman Rushdie won many prestigious awards like the Booker Prize, in spite of the difficulties associated with reading his novels, they have done remarkably well in the literary marketplace. In the light of the changed conditions of book publishing, marketing and sales, what can we infer about autonomy? Does the artistic form of the novel still contain a measure of autonomy and freedom from the constraints of political reality, which allows for the unfolding of its own logic, the expression of utopian hopes, and glimpses of revolutionary social transformation? Deepika Bahri in *Native Intelligence* has used the theories of the Frankfurt School writers to argue that postcolonial novels follow a logic of form, which has been insufficiently explored in scholarly discussions which have focused exclusively on the political content or lack thereof in these works. For Bahri, this is a reductive path, and she focuses on specific postcolonial novels to study their aesthetic forms, and the truths they gesture at. Bahri defines her project in *Native Intelligence* is “a restoration of value to postcolonial literature on grounds of its aesthetic identity as an object among objects, and as object . . . capable of also suggesting the limits of reificatory thought” (*Native*

Intelligence 109). After elaborating on the metropolitan location of production of most postcolonial fiction and their commodification in the academic market, Bahri ultimately draws on theories of the Frankfurt School particularly the concept of “transforming mimesis,” elaborated by Marcuse in *Aesthetic Theory* to emphasize “the tense relation between the poetic and the real, the latter term favoring and endorsing the imbrication of art within the real, and the former insisting on its unique capacity for transcending through transformation” (*Native Intelligence* 114). Thus Bahri’s reading of postcolonial novels endorses Frankfurt School notions of the transforming power of the aesthetic form.

Some Marxist critics like Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik would argue perhaps that the success of postcolonial novels is a sign of their co-optation by institutions of global capital. However, does the economic success of a work rob it completely of its power to offer a compelling presentation of a social problem? I argue in my study that the commercial success or failure of novels does not rob their artistic form to offer a representation of societies and individuals in postcolonial contexts. Once again, if we accept postcolonial novels to have a dual literary lineage, that of modernist and anti-colonial and nationalist traditions, then the theory of autonomy of artistic production although very applicable to modernist art does not work in the context of nationalist literature, which from its moment of birth in a specific political context had to forge a marriage of the aesthetic with the political. The anti-colonial literature also had to be accessible to a wide public. However, if it were mere propaganda, much of this body of literature would not have lived beyond the immediate moment of political relevance.

I would now like to turn to another related area of theory, which disputes the idea of postcolonial artistic production being enmeshed and co-opted by the workings of global finance capital. These ideas emanate from Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* in which he makes a compelling argument against the so-called passivity of consumers. Michel de Certeau demonstrates that consumers are not passive agents, but through myriad ways they express their agency and often subvert the intentions of the producers. De Certeau's examples of consumers exercising their agency are numerous. One of the most striking examples is the case of the religious practices of Indians, converted by Spanish conquerors. De Certeau argues that the Indians did not just accept the religious practices that the conquerors imposed on them, although it may have appeared so, overtly. He draws attention to the ways in which the religious practices were modified in usage:

Submissive, and even consenting to their subjection, the Indians often made of the rituals, representations and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind; they subverted them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept (xiii).

De Certeau's views are in sharp contradiction to Arjun Appadurai, who in his description of disjunctures in the global cultural economy privileges the flow of information, images, migrations of populations but does not confer agency to the consumer. Although Appadurai conveys a sense of imminent possibilities of liberation by the beginning of an era of transnationalism, he seems to draw limits on

these possibilities. While elaborating at great length on the “scapes” theory, alluding to the massive flows of people, ideas, information, etc, and destabilizing the idea of the US as the center of these flows and drawing attention to the indigenization of music and housing styles as they cross cultural zones, he still supports the idea of the “fetishism of the consumer” (42). Appadurai writes that “the consumer has been transformed through global flows into a sign both in Baudrillard's sense of a simulacrum that only asymptotically approaches the form of a real social agent, and in the sense of a mask for the real seat of agency, which is not the consumer but the producer and the many forces that constitute production” (42). This seems to be a premature foreclosure about the possibilities of subversion inherent in the acts of consumption.

Michel de Certeau's position on the act of consumption is quite the opposite of Appadurai, and one, which is more applicable to the consumption of the novel in South Asia. *In The Practice of Everyday Life*, De Certeau argues:

The efficiency of production implies the inertia of consumption. It produces the ideology of consumption -as- a- receptacle . . . this legend is necessary for the system that distinguishes and privileges authors, educators, revolutionaries, in a word “producers,” in contrast with those who do not produce (167).

De Certeau goes on to oppose dominant notion of consumption by elaborating on reading as an act of consumption, which he asserts is not a passive activity. De Certeau argues that “the reader takes neither the position of the author nor an author's position. He invents in texts something different from what they ‘intended’”(169).

This “plurality of meanings” is created not just by literary critics, but by ordinary readers as well. De Certeau regrets that there is a lack of sufficient research tracing the reading habits of ordinary readers.

Priya Joshi in her recent book *In Another Country* uses Michel de Certeau's concept of consumption to write a history of the reception of the nineteenth century novel in India. In a sense, she seems to be implicitly following De Certeau's call for more sustained inquiry into the practices and traces of reading in ordinary consumers. Through extensive archival research, Joshi demonstrates the surprising and unpredictable canonization of particular novels in India. Joshi uses her research to demonstrate Michel de Certeau's theory that ways in which commodities are consumed are differentiated by choices exercised by consumers. The publishing market of Victorian England could not predict or control the kinds of fiction that were consumed in India, nor the ways in which these patterns of consumption would influence aesthetic choices in the novels that would be produced in India. Contrary to the belief that the colonial metropolis dictated patterns of novels consumed, Joshi demonstrates through a survey of catalogs from booksellers and libraries that Indian readers exercised their own choices in the selection of reading materials. Thus instead of Dickens, the Brontes, or Thackeray, the most popular Victorian writers in India were G.M. W. Reynolds and others who are now consigned to oblivion. Meenakshi Mukherjee in *Realism and Reality* has documented that “More influential than Dickens and Thackeray were popular Victorian novelists like Wilkie Collins, Marie Corelli, Benjamin Disraeli, Bulwer Lytton, and a now forgotten manufacturer of bestsellers called G.M.W. Reynolds”(6). Mukherjee has made a compelling argument

that Realism was not the literary style favored by Indian readers and early practitioners of the novel form had great difficulty with realism because the rigid social stratifications of Indian reality did not permit an easy representation of individualism, romantic love, or socio-economic mobility, which are the staple ingredients of the realist form. Priya Joshi has argued that the astonishing popularity of G.M.W. Reynolds can be explained by the appeal of the Indian readers for ethical and moral dilemmas and the form of the melodrama, emerging from the indigenous performance traditions of the Indian epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat*.

The history of the novel is inextricably linked with the history of Empire. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* has argued that “imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible, I would argue, to read one without in some way dealing with the other” (71). However, even in the formative years of the growth and consolidation of the novel, in India, studied by Joshi, demonstrates that the novel did not just do the ideological work of Empire. Joshi argues that “Indian Readers were neither passive recipients of British print, nor bit players in a story dominated by European production,” but engaged in “multiple and varied transactions” with the British novel. Indian readers did not boycott or oppose the British novel but they did express their agency through a process of selection. The selective manner, in which the novel was consumed in India, influenced in turn the kinds of novels, which began to be written by Indians first in Indian languages and later in English.

It is useful while examining the history of the novel in India to bring into play Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the inherent dialogicity of the novel form, elaborated in

The Dialogic Imagination. In Bakhtin's conception, the novel from its origins has been an open form with an immense capacity to incorporate multiple languages of "heteroglossia." Using Bakhtin's theorization of the novel for the particular case of the colonial and postcolonial novel, it is possible to argue that the dialogic form of the novel allowed it not to be reduced to the performance only of the ideological work of Empire. The dialogicity inherent in the form of the novel allowed for it not to be reduced to any singular discourse either of Empire or Modernity or Nationalism. Early Indian novels expressed debates about the advent of colonial modernity in relation to the question of gender equality, evident in the novels of Krupa Sathianadhan, a woman who converted to Christianity and was the first female Indian novelist to write in English. Thus not only can we record a complexity of cultural transactions in the manner in which English novels were consumed in the colonies, the very form of the novel and its dialogic nature allowed for multiple strands of issues in the public sphere to be represented through its form.

Just as the early history of the novel is tied to the history of Nationalism, the novel continues to be the genre expressing a critical engagement with the question of the present crisis of nationalism. I do not subscribe to Frederic Jameson's notion that third world novels are allegories of nationalism, a theory that has been widely contested. What I am arguing is that the novel has performed an active task in building the ground for decolonization and independence. This goes back to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath*, in Bengali, which harnessed an entire nation under the rallying cry of *Vande Ma Taram* (Hail Motherland). Although in the current political climate of right wing Hindu ascendancy and the crisis of secularism,

Bankim's literary legacy has been criticized for the appropriation of militant Hindu nationalism in the creation of anti-colonial novel, it cannot be disputed that Bankim's novel *Anandmath* has functioned as a foundational text of Indian nationalism. The novel in India, as fashioned by Bankim, I would like to emphasize, was never exclusively located in an autonomous aesthetic zone. It also did not have an inverse relationship with the economic market. The practitioners of the early Indian novel particularly Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in Bengali, and later Munshi Premchand in Hindi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee in Bengali, achieved a great deal of popular success. Commercial success gave these novels wide access to the dissemination of ideas of patriotism and the forging of a new nationalist consciousness. Commercial success in the case of Bankim accentuated his stature as a public intellectual, and a political campaigner for freedom and nationalism. Bankim's popular success also did not devalue the aesthetic merits of his literary endeavors. He is responsible for thoroughly engaging with the form of the nineteenth century European realist novel and using it to write the first historical novels for Bengal. His novels also display a great deal of attention to psychological detail.⁴ He took the form of the European novel and gave it a Bengali expression and left a permanent, foundational legacy for Bengali literature.

What is clearly apparent from the early history of the novel in India is that it is a form, which has always interacted with events in the public sphere. It has been inextricably intertwined with the evolution of nationalism. In postcolonial contexts,

⁴ It is significant that Bankim's first attempt to write a novel was *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) in English, which is the first example of the modern Indian novel. Bankim was very dissatisfied with this early work, after which he abandoned the English language, but not the form of the European novel, going on to write very successful novels in Bengali.

the novel continues the task of critiquing and subverting imperialism and this critique is directed not only at imperial powers but also at comprador nationalisms. The dialogic form of the novel theorized by Bakhtin allows for the incorporation of the multiple currents in the debate surrounding the migrant intellectual. Thus these novels can articulate hopes about intellectual migrancy as well as express doubts about its efficacy. Most importantly, the novel form does not merely contain these contradictions, but being an imaginative medium, allows for the rethinking of the intellectual in relation to gender, nation, ethnicity, and popular struggle.

In examining the novel's relationship with the politics of anti-colonialism, in the past and globalization and imperialism in the present, I have found that for each of the novelists that I study, the critiques of societies that the novels are engaged in, intersects in each instance with the crucial question of gender. This is not surprising if we accept that the novel as it developed as a genre expressing nationalist concerns, had to engage with the question of women. Theorists of nationalism have pointed out that nationalism responded to the onset of colonial modernity by the separation of the public as the masculine and the private as the feminine sphere, the repository of traditional values. Nationalism from its beginnings deployed a feminine iconography for the representation of the nation's geographic and imaginary body. This is evident in the South Asian and African novels that I study. In the writings of the male writers, critiques of religious fundamentalism, or bourgeois nationalism deploy the female iconography of nationalism, and also deconstruct this symbolism. In the case of the female novelists, gender is even more explicitly foregrounded as issues of violence on women, poverty of women, and oppressive connections of patriarchies with

nationalisms and immigrant communities take center stage. In my studies of these postcolonial novels, which in one way or another negotiate the question of territorial or diasporic nationalisms, I investigate what Sangeeta Ray has described as “the deep ambivalence of the relationship of woman to nation,” (3) “in the invention, imagination and narration of nations” (Ray 3).

Partha Chatterjee has explored this ambivalence of the woman question in relationship to the discourse of nationalism in the nineteenth century in *The Nation and its Fragments*. Chatterjee argues that the 'women's question' emerged as an urgent issue for the social reformers in the mid nineteenth century under the civilizing mission of colonialism, which cast the Indian woman as a “sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire cultural tradition of a country”(118). Nationalism on the other hand glorified past traditions. It therefore responded to this issue by successfully situating the “women’s question in the inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state. The inner domain of national culture was constituted in the light of the discovery of ‘tradition’” (117). Chatterjee argues that the separation and gendering of the public and the private spheres facilitated a selective appropriation of modernity. This ushered in a new normative Indian woman, the *bhadramahila* (respectable woman), who was educated, liberated but not a *memsahib* (white or westernized woman). This new notion of ideal womanhood set into motion the workings of a new nationalist patriarchy, which while selectively appropriating western modernity and creating the new woman for the nation, excluded many from its fold.

Chatterjee's research has been extended and strengthened by the work of feminist scholars like Susie Tharu and K.Lalitha and Inderpal Grewal. Tharu and Lalitha and Grewal have demonstrated in their works the contested relationship between Indian Feminism and the Nationalist project both before and after independence. In commenting on the women's question in post-independent India, Tharu and Lalitha write, "In contrast to the earlier nationalist struggles in which the nation was consolidated in opposition to an Imperial power, these struggles over India, involve an internal restructuring of the nation under the sign of this upper caste and masculinist middle class" (104). Tharu and Lalitha connect this growth and consolidation of a new nationalist patriarchy, and this middle class to the development of "powerful international interests"(104), alluding to the growth of the global corporate elite. I examine questions related to the development of the new patriarchies in conjunction with globalization in my study of the novels of Buchi Emecheta and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Thus, I argue that gender is the crucial axis around which the postcolonial novels that I study embark on their critical engagements with nationalism, corporate globalization or religious fundamentalism. The intellectual project of these novels is concretized through their grappling with the problematics and specifics of the gender.

My project has been designed as a comparative study of the postcolonial novel by migrant writers from South Asia and Africa. My choice of the novelists Salman Rushdie, Bapsi Sidhwa, Buchi Emecheta and Ngugi wa Thiong'o is based on the fact that in the works of each of these writers there is complex engagement with the politics of the societies they represent. These novelists engage with critical issues like

nationalism, immigration, corporate globalization, ethnic violence, and poverty. The complex range of social and political experiences that these writers grapple with produces in turn complex experimentation with the literary form of the novel. There is no singular aesthetic that they express, but what unites these novels in this study is that they are all expressions of a complex interplay of political realities with a literary form. The novelists differ in their specific aesthetic choices and also the degree of artistic success they can claim. However, each of these writers is attempting to make a critical intervention in debates in postcolonial societies through the aesthetic form of the novel.

I have chosen this group of novelists from two geographic regions to enable a study of a range of postcolonial experiences, to trace points of connection and departure between differing trajectories of the postcolonial novel. My goal in designing this study as such was to begin the process of a dialogue between the political realities and literary productions from these two regions, to prevent the foreclosure of scholarship into watertight compartmentalized regions. I do not in any way claim to have equal access to knowledge of both regions. But while acknowledging the asymmetry of my linguistic and cultural familiarity with the two regions, I believe that a study of the postcolonial novel benefits from a consideration of the evolution of the novel in two different postcolonial geographic spaces, South Asia and Africa, as well as two different metropolitan locations Britain and the US.

In my chapter, "The Intellectual Project: Re-visioning Woman and Postcolonial Community in Salman Rushdie's Novels," I study Rushdie's complex experimentation with novelistic form, as well as his metafictional reflections on the

role of the postcolonial intellectual which are directed towards a critique of Hindu and Islamic religious nationalisms. In this project, the question of gender becomes central, because Rushdie's critique of religious extremisms gets foregrounded in the figure of the postcolonial woman. The question of gender in a critique of present day Hindu or Islamic fundamentalism resonates with the complex history of the Indian Novel and Nationalism, in which gender was a crucial axis of negotiation. The figure of the woman was conflated with the nation from the early nationalist novels like *Anandamath*. The agendas of early Indian feminists like Pandita Ramabai often contradicted agendas of nationalism. From its early examples, the novel can be seen as mode of critical engagement and a talking back to Empire. Rushdie inherits this tradition of the Indian Novel in English, and although his engagement with the gender question lacks the emotional immediacy of a feminist writer like Lalithambika Antherjanam, the question of gender emerges in Rushdie's novels to disrupt discourses of Islamic and Hindu religious fundamentalisms.

In the next chapter, "Between Partition and Immigration: Visible Women/ Invisible Work in the Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa," I study the imbrication of gender in the construction of national and diasporic communities, paying particular attention to the conflation of the woman's body with territory in a Partition novel like *Cracking India*. I argue that even in the recent efforts to revisit the horrific history of Partition, there remain erasures of class, which the novelistic form can at least gesture at. In *An American Brat*, I study the novel in conjunction with the history of South Asian migration to the US, and focus on the construction of the myth of the model minority,

which Sidhwa's novel seems to overtly confirm, but which the dialogic form of the novel questions and even subverts.

The following chapter is titled “Women in Nationalism and Diaspora: Rape, Motherhood, and the Female Intellectual and in Buchi Emecheta's Novels.”

In Buchi Emecheta's fictional oeuvre too, issues of gender take center-stage. Emecheta's novels like Sidhwa's posit the female body as the site of inscription of national possession. In my study of Buchi Emecheta's fiction, I first examine *Destination Biafra*, as a novel, which depicts a civil war unleashing sexual violence on women. In addition, Emecheta explores the female body as the site of reproduction, and the manner in which the maternal body gets harnessed in discourses of national and migrant communities. Tied to the representation of motherhood is Emecheta's representation of poverty in *Second Class Citizen* and *The Joys of Motherhood*. I consider these novelistic representations of poverty to be Emecheta's critical response to dominant metropolitan discourses on poverty. These discourses often blame the woman of color and her fertility for her poverty, without acknowledging the structural conditions, which precipitate this crisis. In exploring the connections between the conditions of poverty and ideology of motherhood, both in Igbo society and post war London, Emecheta tries to re-imagine possibilities and modes by which women empower themselves and resist and critique the ideologies of the tribe or the welfare state that they are implicated in.

Unlike the other novelists studied, Emecheta's novels do not display the formal aesthetic achievements of realism or postmodernism that the other novelists demonstrate. Yet, Emecheta's fiction has continued to remain popular in the literary

market place. This demolishes the idea that postcolonial migrant fiction represents the canonization of a singular aesthetic. Emecheta's novels have been more often read in Sociology than Literature Departments. I consider her enduring popularity to demonstrate the ability of successive groups of immigrants in Britain and people of color in the United States to identify and imaginatively translate events in the life of a poor female Nigerian immigrant in London into their own experiences.

In the final chapter "The Reinvention of Form: Globalization and the Envisioning of Resistance in the Novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o," I study Ngugi's complex transformation of the European realist novel to the Gikuyu language novel of his later works, which he translates into English himself.

Ngugi's early novels have generally been interpreted to be in the tradition of social realism, while his later novels, particularly those in Gikuyu mark his improvisations with oral forms. However, such boundaries of form are not watertight distinctions in Ngugi's oeuvre. In Ngugi's later novels, there is more clearly the emergence of a hybrid aesthetic, which combines elements of European realism with those of African orature. Ngugi is successful in inventing a form suitable for his political project of raising a critical consciousness against the failure of decolonization and the emergence of global capitalism. Ngugi's radical imagination, however, is deeply imbued in the legacy of decolonization and a Fanonian idea of armed national liberation. Although able to conceptualize the new locus of global power in transnational corporations and financial institutions, when it comes to imagining and representing resistance, there is a reverting to the paradigm of armed nationalist struggle. For a movement to become revolutionary, the power behind the

structure of authority and violence, that it opposes has to disintegrate. For a counter-globalization movement to succeed, the consensus that a neoliberal ideology is the only alternative, has to be consistently undermined. Ngugi's novels remain powerful expressions of a commitment to a revolutionary ideology. While not every aspect of the struggle against globalization has been as carefully thought out or articulated, as one may have hoped, in anticipating globalization and in imagining and expressing a consistent rejection of its central tenets, Ngugi is already furthering the new internationalist project. Finally in refashioning the novel, and recreating a new public for it, Ngugi is successful in interweaving his aesthetic goals with his political ones.

Chapter 2

The Intellectual Project: Re-visioning Woman and Postcolonial Community in Salman Rushdie's Novels

Intellectual Exchanges and The Hybrid Form of the Novel

The prevailing trends in Rushdie criticism, emerging as they do from the context of the debate about postcolonial intellectuals, which I have elaborated in my introductory chapter, fall under two categories. The first is a celebration of his fiction as an extraordinary example of the aesthetic of cultural hybridity. This position, ranges from viewing Rushdie as an example of the postmodern aesthetic of what Linda Hutcheon describes as "complicitous critique," This echoes Bruce Robbins' analysis of the contradiction embodied by intellectuals between their vocation of critique and their institutional locations which limits the possibility of non-affiliation and neutrality. Edward Said's valorization of this literary hybridity as part of a general resistance to imperialism in a phase after decolonization is part of the general positive endorsement of intellectual migrancy in this line of criticism.

The second line of criticism is a materialist analysis of the celebration of Rushdie's works as symptomatic of the anti-national dynamics of the global economy of the late twentieth century. This trend, exemplified by Aijaz Ahmad and Timothy Brennan among others, interprets Rushdie's fiction as a privileged brand of cosmopolitanism, masquerading itself as authentic third-world experience, when in fact it only portrays the failure of third-world nationalism and an exilic, distanced,

and deracinated lament over it. It is my contention that the complex body of work Rushdie has produced eludes such a simplistic binary of critical reception.

In addition to this division of critical perception, another level of complexity has been thrown up by the controversy erupting from the Rushdie Affair—the condemnation of the novel *The Satanic Verses* as blasphemy by the Iranian religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini, and his fatwa, the passing of a death sentence on Rushdie, which forced him into hiding for over ten years and unleashed a spate of book burnings and attacks on his publishers and translators, until its official revocation in 1998 by the Iranian government after the death of Khomeini. This extraordinary sequence of events has thrown open a debate about the absoluteness of the value of “free speech” (interpreted dubiously as a western Enlightenment value) against cultural relativism. The Rushdie Affair led to the question of the protection of Rushdie by the literary establishment, and the power apparatus of the British State, and the possible limitation of these factors on the autonomous space and voice of the postcolonial/ third-world migrant novelist. These questions complicate the position of the postcolonial English language novelist as a migrant intellectual, and the relationship of such a specific kind of literary intellectual to the larger body of postcolonial communities.

While I do not subscribe to Said’s valorization of the migrant intellectual as the new locus of resistance to imperialism, I do not believe that the migrant novelist is merely a privileged elite, writing in the language of a European colonizer, in a predominantly western aesthetic form, and thereby isolated from an indigenous community audience. The twentieth-century novel has often been viewed as a genre

of elite art, distanced from a popular readership. This is largely the legacy of the critical reception of modernism and its literary innovations, which has been seen as marking the transition of the novel from a popular form to a more elite, inaccessible genre. Patrick Bratlinger and James Naremore have argued in *Modernity and Mass Culture* that the interaction between modernism and mass culture has been far more varied and complex. Many of modernism's celebrated artistic innovations derive directly from mass cultural forms like cinema and photography. By extending the same logic to the case of the postcolonial novel, it is possible to argue that the postcolonial novel is not an exclusive coterie art, sealed off from the palpable realities of postcolonial societies, and accessible only to academic theorists. I would like to argue that the postcolonial novel is "heteroglossic," containing "material drawn from a variety of sources"(Naremore and Bratlinger14), like most cultural production of the twentieth century, and therefore it would be erroneous to slot it as an exclusive high culture artifact. Nor is the postcolonial intellectual a latter day incarnation of the alienated Romantic artist, as has been suggested by Leela Gandhi. Like the figure of the Romantic poet a soul suffering in solitude against the alienation of his labor by the inexorable forces of industrial capitalism, the figure of the postcolonial intellectual as an exilic genius, dislocated from national boundaries, and crusading against imperialism from the interstices of global culture is spurious mythology. A migrant novelist like Rushdie exists in a complex relationship to his readership as well as in a relationship of dialogue and interchange with other novelists and artists producing their work in a similar diasporic milieu. Such a relationship of mutual exchange and collaborative dependence can be traced in the works of Rushdie and

Hanif Kureishi. The inter-textuality of references, in this case spills over from the genre of novel into film.

Any cursory glimpse at Rushdie's novels will reveal his profound fascination for Hindi cinema. In nearly every novel, that he has written, material from Hindi films enters the novel's action either as incidents in the life of a character, the distinctive nature of his speech or song, or more importantly as the cultural terrain over which the action of the novel gets played out. For example, Gibreel Farishta in *The Satanic Verses* is a loose amalgam of the Hindi film hero Amitav Bachchan and the South Indian film star of theologicals turned politician N.T. Rama Rao. However, Gibreel's song as he falls from Bostan, "o my shoes are Japanese . . . my heart's Indian for all that" is a direct translation of a song from Raj Kapur's film *Awara*. Several events in Gibreel's life, like his injury on the sets of a film, his subsequent hospitalization, the outpouring of national grief, visits by the airline pilot son of the current prime minister, and the doomed affair with Rekha Merchant parallel headlines from Indian film journalism of the nineteen eighties. If these appropriations of Hindi film material seem to be a comic revelry in the debunking of the western notion of literary originality, and an invitation to the bicultural reader to participate in this game of detection of cultural and literary antecedents, it at least foregrounds the popular cultural borrowings of the so called high art form of the postcolonial novel. At a more serious level, the very deconstruction of the myth of the literary artist throws into question the validity of other markers of originality, a topical example of which is the current debate about western patents on medicines for AIDS, or genetically engineered seeds. These patents seek to limit the access of poorer nations to life

saving commodities by using the pretext of original research, sidestepping the issue of indigenous forms of medical knowledge or agricultural practice, which though never patented are often the foundation on which western science begins to develop its innovations.

Besides, the use of Hindi film material for an entertaining, flamboyant display of literary plagiarism, Hindi films often encapsulate in miniature the social and political tensions traced in the larger body of the novel. For example, the *Gaiwallah* film mentioned in both *Midnight's Children* and the *Shame* enters those novels, not as a demonstration of Rushdie's use of popular cultural material but as a demonstration of the intermingling of cultural artifacts with the discourses of nationalism and partition. It is the propagandist, cow-worshipping polemic of the film, in the novel *Shame*, which whips up communal passions and is responsible for the bombing and destruction of Bilquiss's father's movie theater. This leads to her fateful meeting with Raza Hyder, when she is naked, except for her *duputta*, among the riot-affected victims at the Red Fort in Delhi. The same film becomes the catalyst for the meeting of the Muslim rickshawpuller Rashid and the poet Nadir Khan in *Midnight's Children* after the death of Mian Abdullah, the moderate Islamic leader, who for an elusively short period of time offered an alternative to the idea of partition in Indian Muslim politics. Rashid aids Nadir Khan in finding a sanctuary by hiding him in the washing chest of the Aziz family, from which he eventually moves to the underground cellar after Aadam Aziz agrees to give him refuge. In both novels, the film *Gaiwaalah* marks the moment of Islamic disillusionment with the rhetoric of secular nationalism, and the exposure of the overlap of the strands of fundamentalist and secular

nationalisms, from the very moment the decolonization struggle transformed into a mass movement. The polemic of the film and the violence engendered by its reception mark a turning point in Islamic identity and politics. In the case of Bilquis it leads to the formation of the *mohajir* (Muslim immigrant from India to Pakistan as a result of Partition) identity, and in the case of Nadir Khan it leads to an effacement of identity, by the act of hiding in Adaam Aziz's cellar. This invisibility anticipates the subsequent minoritarian nature of Islamic life and politics in post-independent India. The *Gaiwalaah* film thus encapsulates the nascent Hindu religious nationalist rhetoric, entwined in the freedom movement, from its inception, in spite of its overt secular presentation. The film is a cultural repository of Hindu extremism, and it also becomes the stuff of political and social turmoil, as it fuels riots and communal violence.

Thus films and their reception are intimately woven into the texture of Rushdie's novels, and become seamlessly entwined in the plot of the narrative, or its self-reflexive attention to itself as narrative. However, in an opposite vein Rushdie himself becomes the subject of allusion and reference in the fiction and films of Hanif Kureishi. In a charged moment in Kureishi's recent film *My Son the Fanatic*, Parvez, the protagonist who is a Pakistani immigrant cab driver in Bradford, England, becomes the target of racist ridicule in a comedy club. The stand-up comic points at Parvez and says that he can smell a "Salman Rushdie," while the rest of the audience jeer at Parvez's obvious embarrassment. At that telling moment, the mass migrant Parvez's identity gets conflated with that of the novelist/ intellectual Salman Rushdie, under the sign of the same racialized "smelly" foreign body. This demonstrates the

two-way relationship of novel and film. While Rushdie 's novels borrow their plots, characters, and songs from Bollywood (Hindi popular cinema), Rushdie the famous novelist becomes transformed into filmic material, in the canvass of another artist/intellectual Hanif Kureishi, and harnessed for his own polemical critique of growing ethnocentrism and racism in Thatcherite Britain.

Apart from this specific verbal allusion to Rushdie, the plot of *My Son the Fanatic*, parallels scenes of the Rushdie Affair, substituting scenes of burning of the novel *The Satanic Verses*, by groups of South Asian youths, for a scene of burning a brothel, by Islamic youngsters in the film. The film seems to be articulating the debate over secular and religious life choices available to South Asian immigrants in Britain in the aftermath of the Rushdie Affair. This is dramatized through the central conflict between the non-religious, Parvez who listens to jazz music and drinks whisky, and Ali, his son who attends religious gatherings and prays five times a day.

These questions are also articulated by Kureishi in his novel *The Black Album*, which embodies in novelistic form, an extremely intelligent analysis of the Rushdie Affair. The flexibility and dialogic nature of the novel as a genre allows Kureishi to avoid the polarized nature of the debate surrounding the Rushdie affair, tracing instead the growth of Islamic fundamentalist politics in Thatcherite Britain to the growing climate of xenophobia and racism. Religion becomes a badge of difference and identity for an increasingly impoverished and racialized South Asian Muslim youth. Kureishi reveals a nuanced understanding of the attraction of this ideology for the younger generation of South Asians in the light of the failure of the potential of more progressive left wing, working class movements. He is also able to reveal the

blind spots in the western liberal establishment and its failure to see the context of economic and racial injustice, which is the catalyst for the growth of new religious authoritarianisms. For all her radical postmodern pedagogy, Deedee, the young professor, who is the protagonist Shahid's lover in *The Black Album*, has no understanding of the frustrations of South Asian youths who gather on campus to burn copies of *The Satanic Verses*. She is so single-minded in her devotion to the value of freedom of speech that she is ready to turn on the might of the British police on the South Asian demonstrators. In spite of her professed working class sympathies and radical pedagogy, the *Verses* controversy casts Deedee as white aggressor against a racialized minority youth, and it reinforces the cultural divide between free speech and secular ideology on one side and religion and censorship on the other. Shahid, Kureishi's protagonist, cannot inhabit any such clearly demarcated terrain. He feels attracted to the fundamentalist ideology in the context of the dissolution of hopes in other modes of social transformation and the disintegration of other sources of order and value. However, the humorless disciplinarianism of Riaz, the Islamic religious leader and his group is stifling for Shahid. Through Shahid's shifting alliances between the liberal or left wing intellectual world of Deedee and the Muslim youth group led by Riaz and his picaresque adventures, Kureishi interprets the Bradford burnings as a community's abortive anger at the racism, and cultural double standards that it has been subjected to *vis a vis* the British blasphemy laws which protect Christianity but not Islam, directed ironically at a novel profoundly sympathetic to the embattled situation of this very community.

Instead of a presentation of a postcolonial intellectual as an exilic and isolated genius, I would like to posit a more collaborative model of intellectual production. The migrant novelist may be removed from his country of origin, but he is not an intellectual existing in a social vacuum. This collaboration is not restricted to Kureishi and Rushdie alone, nor just to intellectuals inhabiting postcolonial diasporas in metropolitan centers. In a later section of my essay, I will discuss the influence of the Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray on Rushdie's self-fashioning as an intellectual, and the repeated allusions to his cinematic choices in Rushdie's novels.

The novel, as a specific form of intellectual activity, is not disconnected from social reality, but exists as a space of critical commentary on it. As a mode of social critique, the novel is uniquely positioned, being an imaginative medium, and dialogic, in the sense used by M.M. Bakhtin, it is able to avoid the pitfalls and dangers of polarization, which theoretical debates can become a prey to. A familiar example of this is the polarized nature of the academic debate seen in the *The Public Culture* controversy over the Rushdie affair. Charles Taylor expressed support for the book burnings in Bradford using the argument of cultural relativism, tracing the idea of free speech as a specifically western Enlightenment value and legitimating the book burnings as an expression of anthropological otherness. Such an interpretation reinforces the discourse of otherness, albeit under the benevolent guise of cultural relativism. M. Fisher and M. Abedi in their spirited critique of Charles Taylor, emphasize the point that the whole of Islamic society cannot be grouped under under the rubric of religious fundamentalism, opposing the value of free speech. They emphasize the long tradition of debate and free speech in Islamic societies. Talal

Asad's interpretation of the Rushdie Affair in two essays in *Genealogies of Religion* introduces other complicated strands into this debate. Asad exposes the double standards in the British liberal political establishment regarding British blasphemy laws. He points to the contradictions in the establishment's support for such laws for Christians and opposition to the demands for the imposition of similar laws for Islam. While I support Asad's critique of the contradictions inherent in official British liberal multiculturalism, I do not agree with his devaluation of the literary achievement of Rushdie's novel, along with his devaluation of the place of literature in the modern world. Asad reduces the textual multiplicity of Rushdie's novel to one central interpretation, that the novel "brings into play metanarratives of western modernity that conflict with Islamic textualities by which Muslim immigrants in Britain try to define themselves" (286). Asad alludes to the immense appeal of *The Satanic Verses* to a western readership to the process of recognition that occurs when readers identify in the material of Rushdie's novel "textualized memories- the metanarratives of a post-Enlightenment struggle against the institutional and moral hegemony of the Church in Europe and the very recent acquisition there of secular liberties" (286). Thus Asad's reading of the novel as a binaristic opposition between secular post-Enlightenment modernity and religion leads him to a critique of the sacrosanct value of literature in a modern world, linking this category of literature to the civilizing mission of Empire. This line of argument leads Asad to conclude, "Rushdie stands beside Macaulay" (290), since the book urges Muslims to translate themselves "into identities appropriate to the modern (i.e. *civilized*) world" (290).

Although I am deeply aware of the imbrication of the history of the novel with Empire, I am equally convinced that literature did not merely perform the ideological work of Empire. From its nineteenth century origins the British novel was selectively appropriated by Indian readerships, and this selection in reading choices influenced the kind of novel that was produced in the Indian languages and eventually English. The novel in India has had a long and complicated history with the growth of nationalism beginning with the work of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Annandamath*. In the era following decolonization the novel has continued to intervene in critical debates in the public sphere. Therefore, unlike Talal Asad's vision of literature as an entity, which has been a handmaiden of Empire, I subscribe to a more complex view of literature, one which acknowledges its ideological functions but preserves within it a space for autonomy and critique. Once again, I would like to emphasize the dialogic nature of the form of the novel, theorized by M.M. Bakhtin.⁵ This enables the presentation of opposed points of view, enabling multiple perspectives on the debate. The opposed points of view expressed in the form of the novel do not freeze the conflict by transforming the opposite views into an aesthetic form. I consider the novel to be a forum of intellectual activity, engaged in a dialogue with events in the public sphere. Ultimately Asad's polemical attack on Enlightenment values of secularism and their influence in the creation of the modern nation state leads him to a certain inability to acknowledge the repressions of religious orthodoxies, and this

⁵ In his chapter, "Discourse in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination* Bakhtin describes the dialogic form of the novel: "Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized. Examples of this would be comic, ironic or parodic discourse, the refracting discourse of a narrator, refracting discourse in the language of a character and finally the discourse of a whole incorporated genre—all these discourses are double voiced and internally dialogized. A potential dialogue is embedded in them, one as yet unfolded, a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world views, two languages" (325).

limits his astute critique of religious double standards *vis a vis* blasphemy laws in England.

In contrast to each of the positions articulated by theorists of the Rushdie Affair, which often focus one or another aspect, with a certain ideological resistance to acknowledging the other side, the dialogic form of the novel enables Kureishi to avoid a polarized presentation of the Rudhdie Affair. Kureishi offers a delicate presentation of South Asian Islamic society as a non-monolithic entity, vacillating between secular and religious alternatives. *The Black Album* is able to escape the pitfalls of the polarized debate between blasphemy and free speech, and explore the underlying social tensions of industrial decline, and xenophobia, which precipitate such a violent conflict over the reception of a novel.

This unique function of the novel as a mode of social criticism is manifested throughout Rushdie's oeuvre, spanning as it does the societies of postcolonial nations and diasporic communities. The novels may be broadly classified either under a category dealing with material from the Indian subcontinent, which could include *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and the another category dealing with the treatment of diasporic or western material, comprising of *The Satanic Verses* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. However, the hybrid fusion of Rushdie's fictional material makes it impossible to restrict any novel to any particular geographic and imaginative terrain. While Rushdie is deeply involved in the exploration of questions of Indian identity in its nationalist and diasporic expressions, he does not privilege any one over the other. Throughout his novels, Rushdie constantly problematizes the excesses of the uncritical acceptance of any identitarian

ideology. This is not to suggest that Rushdie's aesthetic involves only of the demystification and satirical deflation of all institutions and ideologies from a position of essential non-belief. The clearest expressions of his beliefs emerge in *Imaginary Homelands*. He expresses in these autobiographical reflections, his commitment to a secular non-religious ideology. However he is intensely aware of the seamless entanglement of the religious with the secular in any conception of Indian individual or collective identity.

Islam and Nationalism: A Gendered Critique

One of the principal areas on which Rushdie directs his critical gaze is the discourse of nationalism in India. From *Midnight's Children* (1980) to *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) nationalism has remained a preoccupation in Rushdie's career as a novelist. I would like to divide my discussion of Rushdie's treatment of nationalism under two categories, the first is his engagement with Islamic nationalism in India and Pakistan, and the second is his treatment of Islamic nationalism outside South Asia, in seventh century Arabia, and in the contemporary rise of Islamic theocracies, as in Iran. Thus the theme of Islamic nationalism oscillates between the local context of the Indian subcontinent, as well as the global, which encompasses Islam in the Middle East. This oscillation in Rushdie's treatment is also temporal, between the moment of the birth of Islam and its transformation into a unifying ideology of nationalism in medieval Arabia to its resurgence in the twentieth century as a political force. Along with Islamic nationalism, Rushdie also directs his attention to the discourse of Hindu

nationalism, particularly in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, but perhaps a larger segment of his literary energies have focussed on the other pole of nationalism, diaspora, or the question of South Asian identity away from territorial boundaries, specifically the predicament of South Asian identity in Britain, within the larger diasporic context of Black Britain.

Whether it is in his treatment of nationalism or diaspora, Rushdie's exploration of the complexities of South Asian identity gets articulated through the figure of the woman. Gayatri Spivak, in her essay "Reading *Satanic Verses*," has linked the controversy over the reception of the novel in India to the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in India in the wake of the Shahbano case. She also emphasizes the point that the historical episode of the satanic verses depicted in the novel, is "a story of negotiation in the name of woman. As so often, woman becomes the touchstone of blasphemy" (Spivak 223). The conflict is waged over the place of the three female deities of Mecca, Lat, Manat and Uzza *vis a vis* the monotheism of Islam. Thus the body of the woman is the figure complicating many of these questions of identity. Spivak's insight about the imbrication of gender both in the *Satanic Verses* controversy, in its textual and public dimensions is accurate. In my reading of Rushdie's representations of Indian as well as Islamic nationalism, I focus on the complicated interaction of gender with the discourse of nationalism. In analyzing Rushdie's representation of nationalism, I will examine two Islamic social institutions, the veil and Islamic divorce law, which at least in South Asia, and in Arab countries have become fixed as markers of Islamic identity and difference. Both

these institutions impinge on the question of gender relations in Islam as well as the question of religious identity in the formation of a modern nation-state.

It is useful to bring into the discussion of Rushdie's treatment of the institution of veiling, the history of this discourse in colonial and nationalist agendas. Inderpal Grewal, in *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel*, traces the obsession of colonial administrators with the institution of veiling. Grewal argues that the colonialist imperative to abolish this custom is a project based on the impulse to discipline the colonized female bodies, "to civilize 'Eastern' women . . . to make them less opaque to strip them of their veils and to remove them from harems where they lived lives hidden from the European male" (49). Grewal argues that the harem in Islamic societies and the *antahpur* in Hindu society functioned as a community of women, a space often of friendship and autonomy. However in the colonialist imagination all these forms of seclusion were constructed as a problem or as evil. According to Grewal "harem women in orientalist texts were seen as promiscuous, duplicitous, and often as lesbians, those in the Indian zenana were seen as passive and exploited as well as duplicitous" (53). English women, particularly missionaries contributed in their writings to this general representation of the harem. For Indian reformers, the abolition of this institution became a priority. The rationale offered for the reform of the *antahpur* were better practices of childbirth, hygiene, and morals. Grewal interprets these discourses as ultimately restricting the relative autonomy of the harem, and the infiltration of colonial power into domestic spaces. Grewal argues that these reformist movements did not lessen patriarchal oppression. In fact some of these changes limited traditional privileges that women had enjoyed

in terms of rights to property and maintenance within the joint family system, in matrilineal areas of South India. What is certain is that the discourse of modernity, pushed by nationalists and social reformers instituted a new kind of patriarchy, one based on the Victorian model which required the construction of the middle class woman as “docile, gentle, asexual and nurturing” (Grewal 55).

Partha Chatterjee in *The Nation and its Fragments* has analyzed the manner in which the women’s question was addressed by the nationalists. Chatterjee distinguishes the social reform movement in Bengal in the early and mid-nineteenth century with the nationalist movement of the late nineteenth century. Unlike the reform movement of the Brahmo Samaj, the nationalists were more invested in reclaiming their Indian heritage rather than advancing the program of modernity. Chatterjee’s thesis is that the nationalist movement was able to successfully situate the women’s question “in an inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state” (117). Nationalism successfully split the domain of culture into the material and the spiritual, the public and the private. The nationalist paradigm was not a rejection of modernity, but a selective appropriation of modernity. Nationalism thus sanctioned the appropriation of modernity in the public realm of material culture, prohibiting such transactions in the inner spiritual domain, in which the essential Eastern identity was located, which had not been subjugated by the colonial regimes of the west. What followed from this was a “marked difference in the degree and manner of Westernization of women, as distinct from men, in the modern world of the nation”(126). This led to the creation of the ideal of the *bhadramahila* (respectable woman) as the normative woman of the new nation

patriarchy. Such an ideal woman would “acquire the cultural refinement afforded by modern education without jeopardizing her place in the home, that is without becoming a memsaheb” (128).

Chatterjee and Grewal's research on the women's question in colonialist and nationalist discourse reveals the uneasy and tenuous alliances between the agendas of feminism and national liberation. While in literary representations of nationalism from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath* and Tagore's *The Home and the World* the figure of the woman is conflated with the body of the nation and her progress from the *antahpur* to the world outside is allegorized as the passage of a nation from subjugation to independence, such a correspondence of woman and nation is repeatedly fractured particularly in feminist representations of nationalism. Lalithambika Anherjanam (1909-1985), a highly regarded Malayalam writer is a revealing example. She was a woman born into the Namboodri caste of Kerala, known for its extremely strict adherence to caste rituals and resistance to reform movements. Lalithambika lived in the *antahpur* of her father's house, for a period of two years, after attaining puberty, during which she was totally secluded. After her marriage she became drawn into various social reform and nationalist movements, and broke many of the taboos of a Namboodri woman's life. Lalithambika was deeply influenced by Gandhian nationalism. However after the achievement of Independence she felt a sense of disillusionment with the Congress Party when it did not nominate Akamma Cherian, one of the women leaders of the Independence movement, as an

electoral candidate. In several of Lalithambika's stories, there is an expression of lament over nationalism's unfulfilled promises to women.⁶

Like in India, the institution of veiling has a complex history in the Arab world. Leila Ahmad in *Women and Gender in Islam* traces the intimate mingling of the discourse of the veil with discourses of colonialism and elite nationalism. According to Ahmad, colonial anthropologists and administrators fixed the veil as a sign of Islamic backwardness and otherness. The elite nationalists of Arab societies in their campaign to modernize their societies urged Arab women to abandon the veil. Thus a community's passage from tradition to modernity got imprinted in the presentation of the female body.

The veil gets fixed in colonial and nationalist discourse as a sign of temporal progression from the traditional past to the modern present. In the contemporary moment, in the Arab world, the return to a more rigid adherence to the dress code of the veil, is once again an external symbol of a backlash against the hegemonic rise of global mass culture, which is seen to be predatory in its conquest and erasure of local cultural differences.

Among Arab feminists, there is a great range of opinions on the question of the historic imposition of the veil and its relationship to the structure of gender relations in Islamic societies. Both Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmad acknowledge the radical potential of Islam, as a religion, because of what Leila Ahmad describes as Islam's "ethical egalitarianism." However, these writers differ in their views about the degree of freedom available to pre-Islamic Arab women. Leila Ahmad presents

⁶ See Lalithambika Antherjanam's *Cast Me Out if You Will: Stories and Memoir* Translated and Introduced by Gita Krishnamurthy with a Foreword by Meena Alexander.

the picture of Jahilian (pre-Islamic) society as offering a greater degree of freedom to women, than revealed in Mernissi's presentation. Both agree that in spite of Islam's egalitarian principles, the institution of veiling got used by the male elite to restrict women from claiming their rights, within Islam, like the rights to own property, to remarry after death of a husband or divorce, and even to insert clauses within marriage contracts, limiting husbands from claiming more wives. Mernissi exposes many of the misogynist comments in Islamic *hadith* literature as spurious, and she traces the imposition of the *hijab* as a mode of separating the public and the private to a moment when the prophet's domestic terrain was not respected by his followers, resulting in a delay in the consummation of his marriage with Zeinab, the Beautiful, because of the wedding guests overstaying his hospitality. The rigid deployment of the Koranic verses of the *hijab*, did not take place during the life of the prophet as his wives, even accompanied him to battles and appeared on the battlefield. According to Ahmad, the authoritarian imposition of the *hijab*, was a function of the Ummayyad, and particularly the Abbasid periods of Islamic history, which are marked by the growth of caliphates like that of Harun al Rashid in Iraq.

Whatever the historic genesis of the institution of veiling in Islamic society might have been, in its depiction in Rushdie's novels it accrues several different layers of meaning. At one level, the institution of *purdah* splits space in the Islamic world into the public and the private, the political and the domestic, male and female spheres of being. The crucial link that I am trying to establish is that the discourse of the veil becomes embroiled in the triangulated conflict between colonial modernity, religious tradition and reformist nationalism. I have tried to demonstrate through the

supporting research of Arab feminists that the veil did not always coexist with Islam, and it only became institutionalized in periods of Islamic history, after the life of the Prophet. However, this custom became selectively targeted by colonial administrators as an overarching sign of backwardness in South Asian and Arab colonial contexts. With the growth of nationalism, and the need to integrate with modernity, both in India and in the Arab world, there was a concerted effort by nationalists to campaign for the abandonment of the veil.

This fragmentation of space, set into motion by the institution of *purdah* becomes a metaphor for other kinds of fracture, the fracture of the secular and the religious values in the lives of characters like Adaam Aziz in *Midnight's Children*, as well as fragmentation of the Indian subcontinent into the religiously divided nations of India and Pakistan. The institution of the veil and the institution of Muslim Personal Law, particularly its conventions of divorce, further split those living in the state of India into the majority Hindu and minority Muslim communal identities.

On yet another level, the fundamental splitting of male and female space through the institution of *purdah*, sets into motion the logic of a further fragmentation of female identity under Islamic patriarchy into the sacred and the profane, the saint and the whore.

Gayatri Spivak points out in her essay that gender in *The Satanic Verses* constantly intersects with discourses of nation and community, whether it is over the contested space of the three female deities in early Islam, or the Shahbano controversy which framed the reception of the novel in India. The same

fundamentalist leaders lobbying against maintenance for Shahbano ⁷ pressurized the Rajiv Gandhi government, in India to ban the book, offensive to Muslim minority sensibilities. Spivak's criticism about *The Satanic Verses* is that the novel operates, "within a gender code that is never opened up, never questioned, in this book where so much is called into question, so much is reinscribed" (223).

It is true that Rushdie's agenda is not to crusade for gender equality. I think his primary purpose is to reveal the fault lines where the tensions of gender and nationalism collide, and how each is implicated in the other. Also because of the diversity of his representation of Islamic women, it is possible to see glimmers of subversion of gender hierarchies, however faint they may be. In Rushdie's novels, there are several instances of subversion of gender codes, which are elided in Spivak's reading.

Although, *Midnight's Children* ostensibly juxtaposes the birth of a nation with the birth of a male protagonist and is engaged in tracing his male genealogy from his grandfather, and father, continuing to the birth of his son, the stories of the Aziz/Sinai women are those which intersect and fracture the narrative of Indian national identity. The motif in the novel, which is the chain linking the different generations of

⁷. The issue of Muslim divorce gained center-stage in the national media with the Shahbano case, when in April 1985 the Supreme Court of India granted an older Muslim woman, Shabano the right to claim maintenance from her former husband after divorce. This led to virulent protests by the Muslim orthodoxy that argued that Muslim law put the responsibility of maintenance on the natal family of the woman. Pressure from Muslim leaders, led to the passage of the Muslim Women's Divorce Act, which overturned the Supreme Court ruling and ensured that secular State law would not support Muslim women's claim to maintenance in the future. This act was subsequently picked up by the BJP, the Hindu nationalist party as a symbol of the backwardness of the Muslim community and the specious secularism of the Congress Party, which had piloted the Bill. The imposition of a uniform civil code with no minority privileges, became the electoral promise for all subsequent BJP campaigns.

the family saga, is “the perforated sheet.” Aadam Aziz, Saleem’s grandfather, is the first to experience the perforated sheet when he returns to Kashmir after completing his medical studies at Heidelberg. Naseem, the landowner Ghani’s daughter, is one of his first patients, and her body is available to him for examination, one part at a time, depending on the ailment, through the partition of the sheet, with a hole cut at its center. Aadam Aziz falls in love with Naseem, by conjuring up the sum of her body parts in his brain. This courtship takes place as the independence movement gains momentum. Aadam and Naseem are newly-weds when the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre smears him with blood and causes her to faint. From the early stages in the novel, the perforated sheet, or the institution of segregation of sexes through the *purdah* or veil, is embroiled in the narrative of India’s configuration as a nation.

For Aadam Aziz, too, the marker of his modern Indian identity gets translated into a desire for Naseem to abandon the veil. The issue around veiling becomes the source of their marital conflict. Aadam Aziz’s request for Naseem to come out of *purdah*, and his exhortation “Forget about being a good Kashmiri girl. Start thinking about being a modern Indian woman” (*Midnight’s Children* 33), elicits her stiff resistance “You want me to walk naked in front of strange men”(33). Veiling, and its abandonment as a symbolic rite of passage to modernity for a community, is not restricted only to Islam. Bimala, a Hindu woman, emerges from *purdah*, embracing the cause of nationalism in Rabindranath Tagore’s novel *The Home and the World*, upon the encouragement of her husband.

The Aadam Aziz/ Naseem marriage cannot be read as a simple conflict of western modernity and premodern tradition. The perforated sheet as a mode of

meeting and falling in love with his wife is emblematic of the fragmentation within Aadam Aziz as a result of the clash of the epistemologies of Islam and western science. This fragmentation is evoked in an early episode in the novel, when while bending to pray Aadam Aziz hits his nose against “a frost-hardened tussock of earth” and three drops of blood from his nose harden into “rubies” on his prayer mat (4). This incident makes him resolve “never again to kiss earth for any god or man,” leaving “a hole in him, a vacancy in a vital inner chamber, leaving him vulnerable to women and history” (4). This vacuum is only filled by a substitution of an intimate personal relationship for an emotional connection with a spiritual belief system, Islam, which happens when he marries Naseem through the means of the perforated sheet. Saleem the narrator comments on this episode, “in short: my grandfather had fallen in love, and had come to think of the perforated sheet as something sacred and magical, because through it he had seen things which had filled up the hole inside him . . .” (24).

The marriage of Aadam Aziz with Naseem is consummated by the reappearance of three drops of Naseem’s hymeneal blood on the same perforated sheet, which had facilitated their courtship. However, the fundamental contradiction and fracture is not resolved and the drops of Naseem’s blood repeat the first rupture--the pain and laceration of losing connection with God. The second mark of wounding seems to evoke a sense of alienation, an inability to relate to a fellow human being. The contradiction between modernity and tradition within Aadam Aziz continues to haunt him in his final years when he attempts to catch a glimpse of divinity at the Takth-e-Suleiman in Kashmir, after the death of his son Hanif. This contradiction is

projected on to Naseem during her resistance to come out of *purdah*. In an early episode, Aadam Aziz cannot reconcile to his mother's management of their family jewelry business and expects her to retire into *purdah*—"put some cream on these rashes and blotches Amma . . . But maybe if you wore *purdah* when you sat in the store . . . so that no disrespectful eyes . . . such complaints often begin in the mind" (15). This vacillation between tradition and modernity, between superstition and science shows the slippery and unstable nature of modern, secular identity. Thus just like the veil gets fixed as a sign of the "pre-modern" in Arab societies during the era of elite nationalism, with a subsequent return to it by women of poorer socio-economic groups during a climate of rejection of hegemonic western culture, Naseem's unveiling becomes the sign of Aadam's secular identity. Naseem's resistance to abandon *purdah* marks the problematic nature of this identity due to the continued presence of tradition as an entity refusing to vanish by an externally imposed logic of modernization.

The perforated sheet reappears in the second generation of the Aziz/Sinai family history. Ameena, Aadam Aziz's daughter, marries Nadir Khan in an atmosphere of enforced separation and hiding. Nadir Khan the poet, seeks refuge in Aadam Aziz's cellar fearing political assassination after the brutal killing of his leader the moderate Mia Abdullah. During his exile, Nadir's poetic vocation is thwarted and he is reduced to playing the game of "hit the spittoon" which functions as a metaphor for the art of poetry as social criticism. In a sense, Nadir's enforced seclusion is like living in a *Zenana* or under the partition of the veil. Not being able to show his face to the world emasculates him and this is evoked through the physical metaphor of his

impotence. In the Ameena/Nadir generation the discourse of the veil as a marker of Islamic identity intersects not only with the discourse of modern nation formation through decolonization, but also with the discourse of Partition. The veil is a visible symbol of “otherness” which fixes Islamic religious identity as a minority presence within the modern secular nation-state comprising of a Hindu majority which under the influence of Reform movements and western education were abandoning *pardah* and were integrating into the logic of colonial modernity.

In the context of South Asian history, the veil becomes a metaphor for the splitting of Islamic space, not only in the personal destinies of Islamic characters, but also in the realm of political events surrounding Indian independence. The Indian, Islamic political movement fractures into two distinct paths in the 1940s. On the one hand, there emerges a campaign for a separate national space—the quest for Pakistan, and on the other hand there evolves an alternative of a Muslim minority presence, within secular Indian nationhood. This second alternative is suggested through the shadowy figure of Nadir Khan, living as a guest in hiding in Aadam Aziz’s house, playing hit the spittoon⁸ with his wife in the cellar. Nadir is forced to relinquish his political activism as well as the writing of polemical verse. Thus living in hiding feminizes Nadir Khan, rendering him physically impotent as well as poetically sterile.

The moment of discovery of Nadir’s impotence marks the explosion of the discourse of the veil with another equally controversial issue in Islamic life- the

⁸ This metaphoric representation in the art of satirist has two dimensions. Spit a bodily fluid is connected to various other secretions in the novel’s imagery like blood, snot and urine. This scatological imagery is part of the repertoire of the traditional satirist arsenal from Rabelais and Swift. The game connotes the rage of the satirist against the social ills he tries to critique, expressed through the action of spitting. The other requirement of the game is to ensure that the jet of saliva reaches the spittoon, in other words the raging should be directed at and able to pierce a definite target. Thus spitting should not be just an angry cathartic outburst but a dart able to achieve an end

question of divorce by the repetition of the word “talaq” three times. When Aadam Aziz discovers that his daughter is a virgin after three years of marriage, Nadir Khan does the honorable thing of releasing her from his vows by writing the word “talaq” three times on a note and running away. This method of divorce has been fixed as another sign of Muslim society’s “otherness” in secular/Hindu India. Muslims in post-independent India have sought to cling to their community identity by stolidly resisting the imposition of a uniform civil code in place of their separate personal law.

The moment in *Midnight’s Children* when the word “Talaq” gets inscribed in the hidden world of the Zenana/Cellar the two discourses of veiling and divorce combine to imprint the mark of otherness on minority Muslim presence in India. In the symbolic world of the text, the word “talaq” functions to draw the public discourse on Muslim divorce and divorce as an element of the literary plot into a synthesis, which triggers a recognition that the text and the world are inter-related. Many years later, when Saleem hiding in a laundry chest stares at his mother’s naked rump and hears her weep while calling out Nadir’s name, the perforated sheet or the act of voyeurism it engenders, becomes the cause of yet another fracture. The perforated sheet in this instance destabilizes family hierarchies, for this time it is not a lover staring at a woman’s body but the incestuous gaze of a son at a mother’s body. Saleem also witnesses the fracture of his parents’ marriage through the entry of the narrative of adultery, through the recurrence of anonymous telephone calls leading Ameena to her trysts with her former husband Nadir at the Pioneer Café. Ameena, for all her willed resolve, cannot fall in love with her second husband, Ahmed Sinai. Although no physical adultery takes place, the psychological infidelity of Ameena in

her renewed interest in her ex-husband, and Ahmed Sinai's, in his incessant fantasizing about his secretaries/ "Coca-Cola" girls bring their marriage close to collapse. The fragility of the Sinai marriage exposed in the novel parallels the fragile existence of the Islamic community in post-independent India.

Although the Sinais represent a small and affluent section of Indian Muslims, they cannot escape the scrutiny of the Indian Government, replicating in a sense the legacy of the perforated sheet in the public sphere. The most glaring example of this is the incident of the freezing of Ahmed Sinai's financial assets by the Indian government after the scandal of the Bombay land reclamation project. Like his predecessor, Nadir, Ahmed's entrepreneurial failure is expressed through the metaphor of frozen sexual organs. Neil Ten Kortenaar describes this technique of Rushdie as "the literalization of metaphor." In this method, Rushdie renders metaphorical expressions as physical realities in his novels. For example "fishy" in *The Satanic Verses* is evoked as a literal stench to suggest the suspiciousness of the prophet's imposition of different rules, for himself in comparison to other members of his faith. Thus Ahmed's frozen financial assets are evoked through the literal freezing of his sexual organs. Ahmed Sinai, like Nadir Khan before him, retreats behind a purdah of alcoholic haze and stock market speculation, concretized in the novel by his withdrawal into a solitary office, and raging a war with the "djinnns". This word is an example of Rushdie's exuberant and clever use of multi-lingual puns, the word here conjures the image of demons from *The Arabian Nights* as well as the colonial beverage of gin-and-tonic, part of the cultural legacy of Methwold's cocktail hour.

Thus, if both Nadir Khan and Ahmed Sinai evoke a sense of emasculation of Muslim identity by their withdrawals from political and business life respectively, their marginal presence in Indian life is analogous to the shadowy status of Muslim women living in purdah. However, the predicament of the Muslims living on the other side of the border, that is Pakistan, does not for Rushdie provide any relief or satisfaction. In the Pakistani section of *Midnight's Children*, the veil makes a much more direct reappearance, this time in the figure of Saleem's supposed sister Jamila Singer. In Bombay she is the "brass monkey," a rebellious female child who burns shoes to attract the attention of her parents. In Pakistan, the Land of the Pure, she becomes a famous singer celebrated as the Voice of Pakistan. Hers is the voice of religious purity and passionate national fervor, which gets mobilized for inspiring Pakistani soldiers with visions of the paradisiacal gardens of *Bostan* and *Gulistan* during their campaigns against India. It is a singing female voice, which becomes transfigured to represent a call for military action. Once again, nationalism deploys gender to mobilize feelings of patriotism. Like the conflation of the female body with the body of the nation, the female voice and its emotional content becomes harnessed for the purposes of a militant nationalism. Ironically, although Jamila Singer's voice is completely public, and appropriated by military discourses, her body remains invisible. She sings on stage behind a partition of a brocade purdah, with a small hole cut at its center to allow the notes of her music to filter through. Saleem's family history and his narrative once again falls prey to the overarching trope of the perforated sheet, or the discourse of the veil, and its interaction with nationalism.

The futility of the rigid deployment of authoritarian structures on the female body is revealed through the figure of Tai Bibi, the five hundred and twelve-year-old whore of Karachi. She represents the Manichean split or fracture of female identity in Islamic society, the one half of which is the saintly martyr Jamila and the other the lecherous whore Tai Bibi. These categories are deliberately subverted in the novel. Not only does Tai Bibi's unhoused sexuality, outside the realm of patriarchy and nationalism, undercut the rhetoric of religious nationalism in Pakistan, it is she who is magical in smelling out Saleem's passion for Jamila. This incestuous attraction destabilizes the efficacy of the sheet in preserving sexual and moral codes and honor in a society committed to purity. Not only does Jamila become the object of her brother (although not real, due to the interchange of the midnight babies), Saleem's lust, at the end of the novel, she falls from her status as a singing star of the Islamic nation to that of a pitiful nun, who lives in a convent and loves eating leavened bread. Her change of faith is a satirical deflation of her former religious zeal. From an exalted spiritual and abstract voice, she is reduced to a physical body subject to the simplest craving of hunger. Her former spirituality is parodied in her pitiful fondness of bread.

If the discourse of the veil seems to be intimately intertwined with the question of Islamic nationalism on the sub-continent, how does the discourse of the veil figure in the representation of Islamic identity in diaspora? *The Satanic Verses* recreates early Islamic history and the institution of the veil in Jahilia. The descent of the *hijab* in Jahilia is savagely satirized in *The Satanic Verses* through the brothel episode. This is an extension of Rushdie's logic of the treatment of women in

Pakistan, and Rushdie's insight that the veil splits female identity into the spiritual and the profane. Thus, while the Prophet Mahound's wives are restricted to the harem, they are savagely lampooned by the parodic enactment of the Prophet's household by Baal and the twelve prostitutes of Jahilia.

In *The Satanic Verses*, this split in Islamic female identity into the profane and the holy is concretized through the creation of three pairs of Islamic women, each pair sharing a name. The three pairs of women include Hind of Jahilia and Hind Sufyan of Shaandar Café, Mishal Sufyan, the daughter of Hind Sufyan, and Mishal Akhtar of Titlipur, and finally Ayesha of Desh, and Ayesha the *kahin* of Titlipur. The veil not only splits Islamic space and society, it creates and perpetuates a series of binaries through which women are configured. Hind Sufyan is the religious, somewhat parochial wife of Sufyan, the former Bangladeshi schoolteacher. Her namesake Hind of Jahilia is profoundly anti-Islamic, waging a lifelong war against the prophet, eating the raw heart of the prophet's uncle and even instigating the death of Mahound through witchcraft, or the invocation of the outlawed deities, Lat, Mannat, and Uzza. While, Ayesha of Desh, believed to have been modeled on the wife of the former Iranian Shah deposed by the Islamic Revolution, is an obvious representation of a non-religious woman, her namesake, Ayesha of Titlipur is a *kahin* or a female prophet, leading a group of villagers to a haj, with a promise of the imminent parting of the waters of the Arabian Sea. While Mishal Akhtar of Titlipur is one of Ayesha's chief devotees, Mishal Sufyan, of London is a diasporic South Asian woman, who defies strictures of orthodox society, by choosing her own sexual partner and becoming pregnant, before marrying him.

In these pairs of women sharing a common name the non-religious women subvert the patriarchy of Islam, one way or the other. Hind of Jahilia is Mahound's enemy to the last, resisting conversion, eating the innards of his uncle, and finally hastening his death through witchcraft. Mishal Sufyan, a new kind of South Asian woman, asserts an independent control over her body and sexuality by becoming pregnant before marriage. In the economy of Rushdie's novels, this represents partial autonomy from social institutions. Also, Mishal does not have to enter into an expedient marriage to confer paternity on her child, like Parvati's "arranged" marriage with Saleem, in *Midnight's Children*, which even involved religious conversion. Even if these two women are seen as occupying the periphery of Islam, Rushdie also creates a third Ayesha, the Prophet's youngest and most beloved wife. Rushdie gives voice to Ayesha's resistance to the expedient visions of the Prophet and recitation of divine verses, which give him permission to enter into numberless sexual relationships. Ayesha retorts angrily, "your god certainly jumps to it when you need him to fix things up for you"(386). *The Satanic Verses* is steeped in references to early Islamic history derived from the *Hadith* literature. This body of literature assigns a cardinal role to Ayesha and she is credited to be the source of many of the *hadith*, which are incidents in the life of the prophet, narrated by witnesses. Sara Suleri, in her book *The Rhetoric of English India* writes:

when in the furor that surrounded the *Satanic Verses*, legal and religious questions achieve a simultaneity of a peculiar Muslim character, they underscore a fact too frequently ignored in the hysteria of current debate: Rushdie has written a deeply Islamic book . . . *The*

Satanic Verses is from a cultural point of view, a work of meticulous religious attentiveness” (191).

According to the *Hadith* tradition, Ayesha was renowned for her intelligence and her ability to discourse with the Prophet. After his death she even commanded an army in the Battle of the Camel albeit without success, to decide the issue of succession. Although Rushdie’s characterization of the Prophet’s wife is miniscule, her one defiant speech has the potential to throw into question the legitimacy of the Prophet’s laws.

In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie devotes greater space to the characterization of Ayesha the kahin, or prophetess of Titlipur. In her portrayal we see a subversion of the asymmetries of class power. Mirza Saeed Akhtar is a rich landlord who subjects women to his desires and authority as revealed in his marriage to Mishal. He subjects her to purdah in the rural mansion at Titlipur and sexual license in the metropolis—their social life revolves around watching pornographic films with invited guests who are encouraged to feel and touch each other. In this dualism in Mirza’s character we can see the ghost of Aadam Aziz’s broken nose—the fracture and irreconcilability of modernity and tradition in Islamic men who have had a privileged upbringing and an elitist education.

Ayesha’s religiosity is able to overturn Mirza’s absolute power in the economy of Titlipur. She defies capture in Mirza’s web of sensuality and is able to turn his wife Mishal, his extended family and even the villagers against him. Ayesha the kahin, is a representation of female religious leadership and an embodiment of the ideal of egalitarianism of Islam. Modeled after a real incident, about which Hanif

Quereshi writes in his essay "The Rainbow Sign," the episode underscores the principle of equality in Islam. Among its many radical pronouncements, Islam declared the equality of all human beings, advocated provisions for partial freedom of slaves and the right of women to own property, all of which were far ahead of its time. Although in its contemporary incarnations, Islam is represented by the growth of theocracies and the passing of repressive laws on women, its scriptural message is one of equality. Therefore although the Ayesha episode and its project of a poverty-stricken village going on a Haj on the prophetic promise of the waters of the Arabian Sea parting is hysterical, irrational, and doomed from a practical standpoint, the journey to the coast demonstrates Ayesha's ability to suspend class hierarchies. Ayesha and her group of foot pilgrims reverse Mirza's position of supremacy in the village signified by the Mercedes Benz that he follows the pilgrims on.

Although Rushdie is a declared non-believer of Islam, the Ayesha episode in its subversion of class seems almost to work against the authorial polemic of satirizing Islam. Mirza's unfulfilled longing for Ayesha, and the eroticism in her representation parallel perhaps Rushdie's own complex reaction to Ayesha as a mixture of love and rage. While it is easy to understand the rage as stemming from the basic irrationality of her project of collective action, unlike a scientifically grounded method of collective action, the attraction for Ayesha, perhaps stems from the unacknowledged awareness of the power of Islam to invert hierarchies of social class. Ayesha's attractiveness is the embodiment of the principle of "ethical egalitarianism" in Islam.

I disagree with Spivak's reading of the Ayesha episode that Rushdie takes recourse to magic realism in order to evoke the reality of rural, subaltern India. This idea seems to be based on the assumption that magic realism is a kind of escapism. I have tried to demonstrate that the Ayesha episode not only foregrounds the asymmetries of class and gender in rural India, but succeeds in temporarily inverting them. Rushdie does not make an artifact of magic realism, but uses this technique like so many others to serve his purpose of social commentary.

Thus, Rushdie's exploration of the question of Islam and nationalism is crucially invested on the question of gender. I have tried to show in this section that the woman question featured prominently in discourses of nationalism, but the agendas of feminism and nationalism were never in complete alliance. Ella Shohat in her introduction to *Talking Visions* has pointed out:

Not accidentally, anti-colonialist and anti-racist discourses of national unity have often had to rely on the symbolic image of the (heterosexual) revolutionary woman to 'carry' the allegory of the birth of the Nation, precisely because addressing women's demands for equality might have revealed a weak link--the fact of a fissured revolution in which unity vis a vis the colonizer does not preclude contradictions among the colonized.

Shohat's comment certainly resonates with the history of the Algerian revolution in which women were equal participants in violence against colonizers, but their demands for liberation and equality were denied after decolonization when power reverted to an authoritarian regime. Rushdie's novels are successful in highlighting

the contradictions and fissures between nationalism and gender. Unlike a feminist writer like Lalithambika Antherjanam there is no sense of lived intimacy with institutions like purdah. Rushdie is not a feminist writer in that sense, but within the dialogic novel that he creates it is possible to detect proto feminist subversions of patriarchal hierarchies. I think that Rushdie's novelistic depictions of gender in Islam while providing sharp critiques of the ascendancy of new Islamic patriarchies, implicitly privilege the principle of ethical egalitarianism in Islam. Although he has declared himself to be a non-believer of Islam, Rushdie's cultural identity is shaped by his birth in a Indian Muslim family, and this perspective of being in some ways a member of a religious and cultural minority shapes and informs his engagement with nationalism.

Women and the Construction of Hindu Nationalism

I have explored so far how gender intersects with discourses of Islamic identity in nation and diaspora. Although Rushdie's novels are primarily concerned with the question of minority Muslim identity, the discourse of Hindu nationalism figures in his novels, as a backdrop in *Midnight's Children*, and in the foreground in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. The myth of Hindu womanhood, particularly that of her chastity, is harnessed repeatedly to further the agenda of Hindu nationalism in contemporary India. In this section, I trace the mythology of chastity from its origins in the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, and examine the ways in which this epic is deployed by the Hindu Right to wage their ideological campaign of forging a monolithic Indian

religious identity. Rushdie's novels draw attention to the use of the mythology of the *Ramayana* to police the sexuality of Hindu women, and conflate and subsume their bodies into the imaginary trope of the nation, which must be physically guarded against non-Hindu aggressors.

Puroshottam Aggarwal in his essay "Savarkar, Surat and Draupadi" collected in the anthology *Women and the Hindu Right*, opines "societies whose social values derive sanctity from and whose discourse of power is rooted in women's complete subjugation to men, tend to turn women into autonomous and inanimate symbols of carriers of social honor, often into the embodiments of the sovereignty of state" (30). In *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie links the objectification of Hindu women into abstractions of social honor, and the violence unleashed on them when they refuse to conform to these symbolic referents. I believe that a comparative look at the operations of Hindu and Muslim patriarchies destabilizes mainstream assumptions of the progressiveness of one or the backwardness of another.

In the epic *Ramayana*, Rama, the hero defeats Ravana, the abductor of his wife Sita in a battle, and returns to his kingdom of Ayodhya in triumph. He later banishes Sita to exile because of prevailing doubts about her chastity, in spite of her having passed a trial by fire, proving her purity in public. Rama is still regarded as the most benevolent ruler in Indian mythology and his unjust conduct toward his wife is excused as a burden of kingly duty.

It is no coincidence that in the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1980's the hero/deity who figures most prominently is the very same Rama –warrior king and hero of *Ramayana*, who has been made into the most potent symbol of militant

Hinduism. It is the battle over his mythical birthplace in Ayodhya, the site of the existence of a mosque built by the Mughal emperor Babar, which formed the core of the BJP's ascent to national power. The BJP, the largest Hindu fundamentalist party politicized the myth of Rama's birthplace, and used it as a symbol of religious oppression of Hindus by Muslims, in the past, calling for retribution in the form of the physical destruction of the mosque (which took place in December 1992) and a call to elect the BJP into power.

Kumkum Roy in her essay "Where Women are Worshipped there the Gods Rejoice: The Mirage of the Ancestress of the Hindu Woman," writes that the Hindu Right's persistent claim of cultural superiority because of the references to women scholars in Vedic literature, and the assumption of ancient Hindu women's greater freedom of access to higher education is a myth. Roy argues:

The Rig Veda consists of over a thousand hymns of which those attributed partly or wholly to women seers do not number more than twelve or fifteen that is approximately one per cent . . . while we do have references to women philosophers such as Gargi, women rarely figure as students or teachers in formal situations of transmitting learning. In other words, such women were probably interlopers rather than participants in routine scholarly activities (14).

In an opposite vein, in spite of the attempts by the Islamic clergy to obliterate the presence of intelligent and powerful women from early Islamic history, Leila Ahmad and Fatima Mernissi are able to recuperate the lives of Ayesha, the prophet's wife and Sukayna, his great-granddaughter, as women who defy the prescriptive

image of female submissiveness by their personal rebellions. Mernissi sketches a brief biography of Sukayna, which illustrates her defiance of early Islamic patriarchy:

Sukayna was born in the year 49 of the Hejira (about AD 671). She was celebrated for her beauty, for what Arabs call beauty—an explosive mixture of physical attractiveness, critical intelligence, and caustic wit. The most powerful men debated with her, caliphs and princes proposed marriage to her, which she disdained for political reasons. Nevertheless, she ended up marrying five, some say six husbands. She quarreled with some of them, made passionate declarations of love to others, brought one to court for infidelity, and never pledged *ta'a* (obedience, the key principle of Muslim marriage) to any of them. In her marriage contracts she stipulated that she would not obey her husband, but would do as she pleased, and that she did not acknowledge that her husband had the right to practice polygyny. All this was the result of her interest in political affairs and poetry (192).

Mernissi follows this description up with a personal anecdote. At a conference presentation, on Sukayna, in Penang, Malaysia, in 1984, a Pakistani editor of an Islamic journal challenged her account of Sukayna's life by the assertion that Sukayna had died at the Battle of Karbala, with her father, Husayn, at the age of six, questioning Mernissi's research, although he had no personal knowledge of Arabic. Mernissi responds to the memory of this incident by reflecting:

that verbal aggression that I was subjected to and that attempt to obliterate the memory of Sukayna by a modern Muslim man . . . remains for me an incident that symbolizes the whole matter of the relationship of the Muslim man to time of amnesia as memory, of the past as warping the possibilities of the present (194).

By juxtaposing current scholarship on the status of women in early Hinduism and early Islam, it is possible to deconstruct an absolute hierarchization of religions, which has evolved in contemporary India, with reference to the question of women's lives historically and at the present time, vis a vis their religious affiliations.

Like *pardah*, the discourse of chastity constantly intersects with that of Hindu nationalism. The appropriation of chastity as a value in the political discourse of Hindu nationalism is reflected in the representation of three charismatic female leaders of the BJP. Amrita Basu in "Feminism Inverted: The Gendered Imagery of Real Women of Hindu Nationalism," points out that the triumvirate in the female leadership of the BJP comprising of Vijayraje Scindia, Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambra, have the common thread of chastity connecting all of them. Two of them, Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara are *sanyasins* or Hindu ascetics and therefore committed to celibacy, the third Vijayraje Scindia is an elderly widow, and therefore also occupying a de-sexualized, celibate space in the Hindu imaginary. It should be mentioned that in traditional Hindu society, it is still rare for widows, particularly older widows, to remarry, and women of Vijayraje's generation were expected to dress in white, as a symbolic passage into celibacy from the more colorful and sensual apparel of married women, become vegetarian, and occupy themselves with

prayer and pilgrimage. Such a vision of Hindu widowhood is conveyed obliquely in the depiction of the Widows Hostel, in Benares, in *Midnight's Children*.

The Sabarmati episode in *Midnight's Children* is presented as a modern day version of the classic Hindu epic *Ramayana*. The objectification of women as symbols of national honor is seen in the Commander Sabarmati episode of *Midnight's Children* based on an actual historical incident in the early decades of post independent India. Commander Sabarmati is a distinguished Naval officer, likely to succeed to the country's top Naval office. His wife Leela Sabarmati has an extramarital affair with Homi Catrack, the Parsee playboy and film producer. Saleem the narrator, angry at Catrack for abandoning his former lover, his aunt Pia, and wishing to send a warning to his mother Ameena for her secret trysts with Nadir Khan at the Pioneer Café, sends an anonymous note to Commander Sabarmati, created by the amalgam of newspaper cuttings of headlines. The Commander, on discovering Catrack and Leela together, kills the lovers and surrenders himself to a traffic policeman. In the legal case against Sabarmati, and the massive media attention it gathers, Sabarmati is represented in the public imagination as a kind of warrior/king like the legendary Rama of the Indian epic, *Ramayana*, avenging Ravana for the abduction of his wife Sita. Public opinion is overwhelmingly sympathetic to Sabarmati even when he is sentenced and his lawyer petitions the President for clemency. Rushdie, mimicking the tone of a newspaper commentator writes:

and now great matters are to be weighed in Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Behind the gates of President's House a man must decide if any man can be set above the law; whether the assassination of a wife's fancy

man should be set aside for the sake of a Naval career; and still higher things- is India to give her approval to the rule of law, or to the ancient principle of the overriding primacy of heroes? If Rama himself were alive, would we send him to prison for slaying the abductor of Sita?"(*Midnight's Children* 317).

The same ideology, which excuses the mythical Rama's injustice to Sita, again excuses violent atrocities on women. The cult of hero worship is evident in Nussie Ibrahim's response to the news of the Indian president's refusal to pardon Sabarmati, "Ameena sister, that good man going to prison—I tell you it is the end of the world!"(317)

The events of the Hindu Right's efforts to wage a campaign of electoral ascendancy harnessing the iconic status of the mythical hero of the *Ramayana*, and professing to reclaim his birthplace by destroying a mosque at Ayodhya in northern India, figure explicitly in the *Moor's Last Sigh*, but the invocation of Commander Sabarmati as Rama prefigures in the 1980 novel the potential for the emergence of Hindu fundamentalism in nationalist discourse. The Sabarmati episode underscores the sanctioning of violence in the control of female sexuality within Hindu society. In fact the episode dramatizes the overlap of Muslim and Hindu patriarchies in their quest to control female sexuality. Salem's act of psychological violence—directing anonymous letters to Sabarmati, informing him of his wife's infidelity is perpetrated with the hope of sending a coded message to his mother; it is therefore an act aimed at controlling her extramarital sexuality. Thus Ameena Sinai, Saleem's Muslim mother and Leela Sabarmati, his Hindu neighbor are conflated as women who are

both subjected to violent forms of control of their sexualities. This incident renders as spurious the Hindu fundamentalist contention that Islamic culture is backward and medieval because of its treatment of women, whereas Hindu culture is superior because it never subjected women to ills such as the veil, polygamy, and easy divorce.

It is important to note that in the representation of the Sabarmati episode as a contemporary *Ramayana* the abductor figure is the Parsee Homi Catrack, a fact which underscores the non-Hindu man as a foreign sexual aggressor, defiling the honor of the Hindu community, through his assault on the Hindu woman's body. In the economy of Hindu patriarchy, the honor of the nation resides in the chastity of the female body.

The same moral economy is evoked in Rushdie's later novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*, in "The Kissing of Abbas Ali Baig" episode. This incident evokes the potential of eroticism and violence underpinning the Hindu Muslim encounter, the most salient myth of which is perhaps the fourteenth century legend of Alauddin Khilji's passion for Padmini, the Rajput queen of Chittor. Alauddin, the Muslim king, falls in love with Padmini upon seeing her reflection in the mirror. After the military defeat of Chittor, Padmini and the other women of Chittor commit *jauhar*, or mass immolation, preferring death to the dishonor of sexual violation by the conquerors. In the novel, Abbas Ali Baig, a famous Indian batsman, scores a great innings against Pakistan in a test match. This is followed by a female Hindu fan rushing up to Baig, and kissing him, in full view of the Brabourne Stadium crowd. Aurora, the protagonist of the novel, who is an artist, witnesses the "gasp-provoking scandalous kiss, a kiss between

beautiful strangers perpetrated in broad daylight and in a packed stadium, and at a time when no movie house in the city was permitted to offer its audiences so obscenely provocative an image”(228). This reference to movies is also reminiscent of Rushdie’s parody of Hindi film censorship in the *Lovers of Kashmir* episode, of *Midnight’s Children*. In that film, Saleem’s uncle Hanif, the movie director, invents the famous “indirect kiss,” where the hero and the heroine kiss sundry objects like flowers and feathers instead of each other, as a mode of escaping from the scissors of the censor board. Of course, the indirect kiss only ushers in the era of titillation in Hindi cinema under the guise of limiting obscenity and promoting decency. Aurora, in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, paints a picture of the kissing incident transforming in her work, “the real shy peck”(228) into “a full scale western movie clinch”(228). The painting generates a lot of media attention, when it becomes “ a state of India painting . . . a generational cry of sexual revolt” (229). More significantly, the painting and the original incident get seized by Ramon Fielding, nicknamed Mainduck (Toad), whose character is based on the real life leader of the Shiv Sena, the Hindu militant party of Bombay, Bal Thackeray. Mainduck, accuses the Muslim Baig of losing his wicket, after the kiss accusing him of pro-Pakistani sympathies. He inverts the facts of the episode to fit the trope of a Muslim man besmirching the honor of a Hindu maiden—“And this is the fellow who has the nerve to kiss our patriotic Hindu girls” (230). Mainduck exploits the incident to whip up communal hostility against the painting and the cricketer. Cricket, the turf of former encounters between the colonizers and the colonized, gets entwined in the discourses of Hindu and Muslim communal politics. In recent years, the Pakistani cricket team has been prevented

from playing against the Indian team in the increasingly Hindu militant climate of Bombay.

The depiction of the Widows Hostel in *Midnight's Children*, demolishes once again the spurious claims of the Hindu Right that continuously project oppressions of women as a feature of the "other" Muslim community. The following excerpt expresses Rushdie's depiction of the bleak existence of widowed Hindu women

The palace is a home for bereaved women now; they, understanding that their true lives ended with the death of their husbands, but no longer permitted to seek release in sati, come to the holy city to pass their worthless days in heartfelt ululations. In the palace of the widows lives a tribe of women whose chests are irremediably bruised by the power of their continual pummellings, whose hair is torn beyond repair, and whose voices are shredded by the constant, keening expressions of their grief (*Midnight's Children* 516).

Hindu widowhood, from its historical association with the practice of sati to its contemporary expectations of celibacy, once again undercuts the prevalent myth of Hindu society being a haven of women's rights as opposed to Islam's barbarism.

Just as Rushdie parodies Bal Thackeray in the characterization of Mainduck, Uma Sarasvati, Moor's lover and a religious artist, is a satiric depiction of the real life Uma Bharati, one of the leading religious/political divas of the Hindu Nationalist Party, the BJP. The fictional Uma is not a religious politician, but a religious artist. As the novel unfolds, Uma Sarasvati emerges as a liar and a schizophrenic. In a bizarre episode, she prepares for a melodramatic end for Moor, by prompting him to

commit suicide, but dies because of a fatal exchange of the cyanide pills. If we juxtapose this against Uma Bharati's alleged affair with another religious leader Govindacharya, which leaked into the press and Bharati's confession that she had taken an overdose of sleeping pills and had been saved by her secretary, the world of tabloid journalism explodes on the "high cultural" terrain of the postcolonial novel. Like film before, this time journalism enters unabashedly into the plot of the novel. More significantly, the Uma Sarasvati plot reveals the contradiction between appearance and reality, and the dishonesty embedded in the representation of Hindu female leaders as embodiments of chastity. The chaste women of the BJP trio have been explicitly linked to the incitement of violence against Muslims, particularly the rape of Muslim women.⁹ In the novel, Uma is a split personality, the religious artist in public, and the violent, dishonest and mad woman in private. This split which eventually leads to her death is an oblique comment on the dichotomy between the mythic presentation of Hindu women leaders as celibate, righteous, and of high moral caliber, when in reality, they are not only capable of sexual lapses (Uma Bharati's liaison with Govindacharya) but more significantly, inciting communities to rape, revenge and murder, and fomenting and sanctioning violence

The myth of Hindu female chastity is also undercut by the narrative of the devdasis in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, which exposes the nexus between commerce and religion in the exploitation of female sexuality under the cover of a religious agenda. Abraham Zogoiby, under the pre-text of spice trade is involved in a prostitution

⁹ Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana in "Problems of a Contemporary Theory of Gender," reveal that the new actor in the battlefield of Hindutva is marked by her "modernity and indeed her feminism"(512). They chronicle "Riots now have a new profile with women, sometimes middle class women, actively participating in Bhagalpur in 1989, Ahmedabad in 1990, or Surat in 1992"(512).

racket, which transports women from Hindu temples in south India to Bombay. Devdasis are women who served in the temples by performing religious duties, and performing devotional song and dance. However, they were sexually exploited by the Brahmin priests. Rushdie gives this traditional form of exploitation a new commercial twist by expanding the horizon of the geographic region of exploitation to the metropolis of Bombay. This structure of sexual exploitation is the dark underbelly of the religious valorization of chastity. The binarism in the splitting of female Islamic identity by the purdah is duplicated in this similar construction of the sanyasin and the devdasi—the celibate ascetic whose other face is that of the temple prostitute, exploited by the Brahmin priest.

Mapping Gender in Diaspora

I have so far, elaborated the control of female sexualities, in the discourses of Islamic and Hindu nationalisms. But this structure of patriarchal domination does not disappear in the formation of diasporic identity, which is ostensibly based on hybridity, mongrelization, and impurity as opposed to any pure or monolithic notion of identity. Rushdie celebrates the aesthetic of cultural hybridity in many passages of autobiographical reflection in *Imaginary Homelands*. The fusion of languages, myths and images, resulting from cross-fertilization of his bicultural literary legacies is palpable in nearly every page of his novels. While the aesthetic of cultural hybridity produces astonishing literary innovations, Rushdie does not celebrate hybridity and the experience of diaspora, from which it emerges in an uncritical manner. The

encounter between two cultures is nearly always represented as painful and full of contradiction. The difficulties and contradictions inherent in any bicultural encounter is embodied in *The Satanic Verses* through a series of inter-racial relationships, principally Saladin/ Pamela and the Gibreel/ Alleluia relationships. Sara Suleri has read the relationship between Gibreel and Saladin as part of a continual trend in Indo-Anglian fiction, from *Kim* and *A Passage to India*, in which she identifies the real erotic thrust to be the homoerotic desire between two male protagonists, usually a white and a brown man, played out against the quest for the body of a woman, or a feminized landscape. The triangulation in *A Passage to India*, occurs between the erotic relationship between Fielding and Aziz, with Adela Quested representing the other pole of this triangle, and the love between the lama and Kim embodies the homoerotic thrust of *Kim*, with the landscape of India, forming the counterpoint of the homoerotic theme. While this is certainly an interpretative possibility, I see in the inter-racial relationships of the two heroes, a continuation of the trope I have tried to trace in Islamic and Hindu nationalisms—the sexuality of women forming an axis in the construction of identity, and hence the need to control and police it for political agendas. Although there is no overarching motif like the veil or chastity, as a device structuring the representation of diasporic female identity, transnational or diasporic women are very much within the ambit of patriarchy, albeit a more global one. If the perforated sheet is the unifying motif of *Midnight's Children's* multi-generational saga, Saladin's transformation into a goat and the reclaiming of his humanity are the images around which most of the issues raised in *The Satanic Verses* can be said to cohere.

Saladin marries Pamela Lovelace in his quest for Anglicization, her appeal lies in her Richardsonian name and the her voice, which Rushdie describes as “a voice composed of tweeds, headscarves, summer pudding, hockey-sticks, thatched houses, saddle-soap, house parties, nuns, family pews, large dogs and philistinism . . . Yorkshire pudding and hearts of oak, that hearty rubicund voice of ye olde dream-England which he so desperately wanted to inhabit” (180). Thus, Pamela is an abstraction for a particular notion of Englishness, and not a complex individual, just like Jamila Singer was a symbol of patriotism and pure devotion for Pakistan.

Saladin begins to develop horns and transform into a goat, under the dehumanizing treatment of British immigration officials, after he falls from the *Bostan* flight explosion, and lands in England. This metamorphosis is simultaneous with the breakdown of his marriage and the commencement of Pamela’s affair with Jumpy Joshi. Horns from Elizabethan drama onwards have been symbolic of cuckoldry. Chamcha’s horns concretize his “otherness,” and the perception of him as an alien by the society he has tried to be at home in. But his horns also reiterate his emotional and sexual alienation from his wife, who refuses to recognize her former husband in his grotesque apparition. Saladin had managed to make a slippery niche for himself in the middle class world of Britain that to him had always represented a haven of grace and civilization. His passage into this echelon, had been predicated upon the fact of his invisibility—he succeeds in his chosen profession of acting, indeed as a ventriloquist, a job that paves the way to middle class life, at the cost of erasing his physical identity. His rupture from the anesthetized, privileged cocoon of the British middle class happens when the physical body, he had obliterated, erupts in

a grotesquely metamorphosed form. But the representation of Saladin's transformed body employs a set of signs, particularly the horns, which has traditionally been used as a symbolic evocation of a man's loss of his honor because of the infidelity of his wife. Thus although, Saladin's horns are primarily an evocation of his racialized otherness in Britain, that alienation or fracturing of identity is complicated by the literary symbolism of the horns as a motif of cuckoldry. Thus not only is Saladin's identity constituted as a racial other in Thatcherite Britain, another fundamental aspect of his identity is his male gender which confers on him certain privileges, in sync with the ideology of patriarchy. Within the patriarchal framework Saladin's identity is based on a structure of gendered differences in which the accepted norm of female sexuality is monogamy and subservience to male authority. When this order is disturbed, it impacts directly on Saladin's identity, resulting in his loss of manhood and transformation into a goat, a traditional literary symbol of sexual ridicule.

In the Gibreel/Allie relationship, the feudal code of gender and sexuality, invoked by the horn image is taken a step further, by the entry of violence as a mode of policing female sexuality. In an episode, eerily similar to Saleem's anonymous notes to Commander Sabarmati, Saladin, insanely jealous of Gibreel for possessing the Ice Queen, Allie Cone, a white woman who is once again an abstraction for Englishness, makes a series of malicious, anonymous phone calls to provoke Gibreel's sexual jealousy and paranoia. Although, Allie and Gibreel break up and move on, like a modern western couple, at the end of the novel, Gibreel murders Allie Cone and Sisodia, whom he mistakenly assumes to be her lover. This violent and jealous rage resembles Commander Sabarmati's act of the double murder of Lila

Sabarmati and her lover Homi Catrack. Although this murder is the product of a schizophrenic mind, and cannot be interpreted by the media, as a heroic Rama avenging an abductor, Ravana, it marks the resurgence of the pre-modern feudal code of honor and revenge, structured around the control of female sexuality. It is of no consequence that Allie Cone is neither a Muslim, nor a Hindu woman and that she has no personal connection with such a code of cultural values. In a global metropolis, at a moment of cultural homogenization, the Gibreel /Allie relationship demonstrates what Stuart Hall suggests in his essay "The Local and the Global," that "homogenization is never absolutely complete"(28). Gibreel and Allie inhabit divergent temporalities, like many other groups of people, thrown into close contact and conflict in the global metropolis. This can be understood to be a result of what Hall describes as the advancement of capital "on contradictory terrain"(29). Hall elaborates on this idea when he writes:

But the more we understand about the development of capital itself, the more we understand that it is only part of the story. That alongside the drive to commodify everything, which is certainly one part of its logic, is another critical part of its logic, which works in and through specificity. Capital has always been quite concerned with the question of the gendered nature of labor power. . . . It has always been able to work in and through the sexual division of labor in order to accomplish the commodification of labor. It has always been able to work between the different ethnically and racially-inflected labor forces. So that notion of the overarching, ongoing, totally rationalizing, has been a

very deceptive way of persuading ourselves of the totally integrative and all-absorbent capacities of capital itself (29).

In this episode, the contradictions in the advancement of global capital are registered as the price of death on the body of the white British woman, Alleluia Cone.

The relatively minor interlude of the relationship which develops between the aging Rosa Diamond and Gibreel opens up a space for another kind of critique of diaspora, this time in the vestigial sensibility of Empire which is palpable in Thatcherite Britain. The most important characteristic of this sexual encounter is its quality of mimicry of an original script of love and jealousy, played out in Argentina between the white woman, Rosa, and her lover the colonized native Martin, which ends with the brutal killing of Martin, by Rosa's husband Don Enrique. Gibreel and Rosa seem to be playing out a parody of the original inter-racial romance. The allusions to Argentina immediately bring into focus the political context of the Falklands war, to which there are several references in the text. The mimicry of the trope of inter-racial romance in the repetition of the Rosa/ Enrique relationship in the Rosa/Gibreel encounter creates a recognition of the trope of mimicry in the political sphere. An oblique critique of Britain's campaign in the Falklands, is made by Rushdie, by dramatizing the absurdity and ludicrousness of any attempt at repeating or mimicking history. Rosa's senility and her decrepit body evoke the image of Britain's dying grandeur as a colonial power, and the ludicrousness of her posturing as a fearful military adversary. The romance of Rosa and Gibreel can be read as a metaphor for Britain's romance and longing for her imperial history. However any political attempt to relive her imperial grandeur, like the adventure in the Falklands

war comes across as a somewhat ridiculous parody of the original script of imperial conquest.

I do not want to give the impression that in Rushdie's novels women emerge as victims in the multiple discourses of nationalism and diaspora. What I have been attempting to demonstrate is that Rushdie's texts deploy gender to deconstruct discourses of nation and diaspora. If Rushdie's novels are engaged in a critique of nationalism and diasporic postcolonial communities, does it follow then, that his aesthetic is a satiric deflation of existing institutions and ideologies? Is there an alternative to the satiric vision in Rushdie's aesthetic, which works in association with his first project of social critique.

Rushdie's Reflections on the Postcolonial Artist

Unlike Timothy Brennan, I do not believe that Rushdie's aesthetic is only an expression of lament over the failure of third world nationalism. Firstly, I have tried to emphasize in my discussion that Rushdie's critique is not limited to nationalism. He is equally critical of transnational diasporic communities, both for the psychological inferiority and mimicry that immigrants like Saladin Chamcha bring to such a community, from the history of the Empire, and the rising xenophobia and ethnocentrism that is a gruesome lived reality in these diasporic spaces, particularly in the Thatcher years. If a strain can be identified in Rushdie's aesthetic which runs counter to the satiric, demolishing impulse, it can perhaps be found through a close attention to his reflections on the postcolonial artist, scattered through the novels. In

these metafictional passages, Rushdie reflects on the role of the artist/intellectual in postcolonial societies.

The most sustained of Rushdie's musings on the artist occur in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, although reflections on the intellectual can be located in nearly every novel. In this novel, Rushdie's artistic credo is expressed through the character of the painter, Aurora Zogoiby. For Rushdie, art represents, first and foremost, an autonomous and non-religious space, in fact, a space explicitly in opposition to religion. If in his novels, Rushdie constantly exposes the imbrication of religious discourses, in narratives of nationalism, he wants to claim for art a space untouched by religion. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, this separation of art and religion is evoked in Aurora's frenzied dance on the parapet of her apartment while the rest of Bombay dances in the street to the religious fervor of the Ganpati festival. In a similar vein Baal, the satirist of Jahilia in *The Satanic Verses*, inhabits the world of the brothel, where he deliberately parodies the space of the mosque and its holy black stone. Baal's space is the underworld, the diabolical other of the religious institution.

This desire for autonomy in art is to insist on a separation from the religious order, but not to suggest a solipsistic withdrawal into dilettante aestheticism. For Rushdie, art is connected to politics, but distinct from political activism. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Aurora's painting of Abbas Ali Baig stirs up a nation's conscience against censorship and sexual repression with a far greater degree of spontaneous efficacy than Mynah's (Moor's Sister) "struggle against phallocracy" in her career as an activist lawyer, campaigning against the repressive state apparatus put in place by

the Emergency. This presentation of course is an indirect validation of Rushdie's own career as a literary artist rather than a political activist.

Rushdie's representations and comments on Aurora's paintings affirm his commitment to an art which is secular, culturally plural, and syncretic, particularly in the descriptions of the Moor Paintings which invoke the myth of Arab Spain in order to construct the identity of a minority clan in India. He is, however, extremely wary of an art overtly committed to any political ideology. In the wake of the "Kissing of Abbas Ali Baig" painting controversy, Rushdie records through an elaboration of Aurora's point of view his hesitancy about any forced synthesis between politics and art—"She was obliged to declare, to counter accusations of social irresponsibility by divers 'experts' and took to muttering bad-temperedly that, through out history, efforts to make artists socially accountable had resulted in nullity, tractor art, court art, chocolate box junk" (*Moor* 234).

In a sense this self-reflexive outburst resembles Adorno's stance on commitment in art, with a declaration of preference for a more suggestive work by Beckett over a more overtly committed one by Brecht. Rushdie seems to trust the internal logic of the works to have more powerful impact, and be more political than their explicit declared purposes.

In rejecting propaganda in art, no matter what the ideology being spread, Rushdie through a discussion of Aurora's works expresses a preference for indirection and subtlety of style and method. This choice of style replicates a commitment to freedom from ideological affiliations. Thus although, Rushdie admires the realism in the work of the Bengali filmmaker Sukumar Sen, it is the

fantastic and the fabulist elements in this filmmaker, that elicits Rushdie's deepest admiration. Sukumar Sen is an obvious allusion to Satyajit Ray, whose films, inhabiting the other end of the spectrum of Indian film, is mentioned time and again in Rushdie's novels.

It is no coincidence that in the most fabulist of Rushdie's novels—*Haroun And The Sea of Stories*, two of the names of the fabulist "plentimaw fish"—Goopy and Bagha are drawn from the names of characters from Ray's celebrated film trilogy for children. In *Haroun*, Rashid Khalifa, the intellectual's poetic sterility coincides with his sexual betrayal and political emasculation. When his wife, Sorraya elopes with Mr. Sengupta, insulting Rashid's choice of vocation, scorning the world of the imagination, the loss of the validation of his identity by his wife is immediately followed by writer's block—an inability to speak or write in public. He is unable to resist the manipulation of Mr. Buttoo, a politician from the valley of K, who enlists his oratorical powers for his political campaign. Rashid Khalifa's act of defiance against this political appropriation of his artistic powers is not through an organized struggle or a political campaign, but simply through the act of narration. When he narrates the adventures of his son Haroun, against Khatam Shud, the people of K, who are his audience, are able to recognize the connection between the narrated story and their own predicament. They rise in rebellion and depose the corrupt Mr. Buttoo. In this simpler and more direct representation of the intellectual, in the genre of a children's story, Rushdie represents the intellectual as a catalyst in a political struggle. In this conception, the intellectual is more efficacious in hastening political change than a political activist.

Although, poetic failure merges with the trope of infidelity, in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, in a sense Rashid's loss of his poetic vocation parallels Saladin's loss of his humanity after the losses of Sorraya and Pamela, respectively; Rushdie is also able to subvert sometimes this phallogentric conception of writing. In *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie substitutes the metaphor of writing as a phallic act by the narrative frame of the arabesque. In *The Arabian Nights*, narration is a feminine act of survival against the tyranny of an autocratic monarch Shaharyar, who marries women, sleeps with them for a night, and then assassinates them. This cycle of sexual exploitation and death is reversed by Scheherezade, the vazir's daughter, through her use of the serialized narrative, leaving a portion of the story unsaid, which enables her to eke out another night of life.

This method of seduction of the Prince by Scheherazade parallels the seduction of Aadam Aziz by the perforated sheet. However, in Rushdie's novels the gender hierarchy of the narrator and auditor in *The Arabian Nights* is reversed. In *Midnight's Children* it is Saleem who is cast in the role of the narrator, and Padma in the role of the auditor. In *The Moor's Last Sigh* the arabesque motif is more directly evoked when Moor and the Japanese artist Ae become prisoners of the crazed, deracinated artist Vasco Mirinda. Mirinda in imprisoning Moor and Ae wishes life to imitate a painting of Aurora, which depicts the Sultan Boabdil's capture of the historic Moor and his lover Chimene. For Moor, living under the tyrannical watch of Vasco Mirinda, in his castle at Benengeli, Spain, writing becomes an act of clinging to a measure of sanity in an irrational world. In this novel, we also see the proximity of creativity and madness in the terrain of art. Aurora's secular, satiric art is

juxtaposed against Uma Sarasvati's and Vasco Mirinda, both of whom are subject to delusions and madness

Moor's act of writing expresses defiance against the uncontrollable forces of torture and captivity. Moor's predicament is a comment on Rushdie's own situation in the long post fatwa years. Yet, like Scheherzade living under the threat and the unpredictability of a tyrant's decree of death, he continues to write, hoping perhaps to subvert the decree by her strategies of evasion and wit. By conceptualizing the artist as Scherezade,¹⁰ Rushdie not only inverts the paradigm of writing as a phallic act, invoked in the conjunction of poetic failure with impotence or sexual betrayal, in the destinies of Nadir Khan and Rashid Khalifa, respectively, he also subverts the notion proposed by some critics that his aesthetic is only the legacy of western modernism and postmodernism. Saleem may have been fathered by Gunter Grass's Oskar, as has been proposed, by Patricia Merivale. However, his final destiny, like that of Moor, is a Scherazadian project of narration as a mode of survival, whether it is in the feminized space of the Braganza pickle plant, from which his predecessor Saleem does not escape, or the house of captivity in Benengeli, Spain, from which Moor is able to depart. to catch a glimpse of the Moorish fortress of Alhambra, "Europe's red fort, sister to Delhi's and Agra's"(433), which for his mother had inspired a vision of India's legacy of cultural pluralism.

Thus through a reading of the metafictional passages of Rushdie's novels, it is possible to arrive at a tentative map of his conception of the postcolonial artistic and

¹⁰ Fedwa Malti Douglas's discussion of Shahrazad in *Woman's Body Woman's Text*, argues that Shahrazad's " world is the one of evanescent oral performance . . . To the males is reserved the authority and permanence of written literature." (28). Fedwa Malti Douglas alerts us to the limits of

literary project. In this imaginative mapping of the intellectual's role in postcolonial societies, Rushdie is able to partly subvert the gender hierarchies framing representations of intellectual/artist.

In my discussion of Rushdie's novels, I have explored Rushdie's work as a postcolonial intellectual engaged in the critical debates within South Asia and the South Asian diasporic community in Britain. Rushdie utilizes the form of the postcolonial novel to offer complex presentations of issues affecting these societies. His views on art and politics, revealed in many autobiographical and metafictional passages in his novels, reject the idea of a direct relationship between the two. Even though Rushdie privileges the value of autonomy of art, he does not subscribe to an artistic credo that only privileges the aesthetic. For him the aesthetics of the postcolonial novel, while not performing a directly political task is vitally connected with the function of offering a critical perspective on events in the public sphere.

Literary criticism of Salman Rushdie has either focused on a celebration of his hybrid aesthetics or have devalued his literary achievements because his success in the literary marketplace has been interpreted as a sign of political co-optation in an era of global capitalism. Rushdie's engagement with postcolonial nationalism has also been read as a lament over the failure of third world nationalism. In my reading of Rushdie's novels, I have sought to avoid these polarized positions by focusing on the dialogic form of the novel which is able to express the contradictions of nationalist and diasporic identity formations. Most importantly, I have tried to explore the connections and departures in the literary texts and the social contexts, which shape

thinking of Shahrazad as a female author. Her act of narration is an oral one, precipitated by a crisis, and hence temporary. It is Shahriyar who has her tales written down.

their cultural meanings. My readings are premised on the belief that the history of literature in postcolonial societies has always been an interplay of subjugation and resistance. Rushdie inherits the tradition of nationalist literature and continues the task of critiquing Empire and various forms of authoritarian religious nationalisms. In interpreting the specific critiques embarked on by Rushdie I have emphasized the crucial connection of gender, in each example of Rushdie's engagement with a critique of nationalism or diaspora. Although not a feminist writer, and one for whom race and empire seem to have been more visible targets of attack, a glance at his work through the lens of transnational feminism, reveals how his literary imagination concretizes his polemical perspectives on empire, race and nation through a negotiation of the gender question.

Chapter 3

Between Partition and Immigration: Visible Women / Invisible Work in the Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa

Rape, Rescue and Selective Remembering

The imaginary contours of Bapsi Sidhwa's oeuvre seem to oscillate between the geographical borders of South Asia and the South Asian Diaspora in North America. Differing from the predicament of Salman Rushdie, Sidhwa's situation as a migrant intellectual is marked by her location in the United States, rather than Britain, although even this distinction is qualified by the fact that Rushdie has lived in the US, and written about it in his more recent novels like *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. However, it would not be inaccurate to locate the bulk of Rushdie's diasporic musings to the geographic and cultural space of Britain and Sidhwa's to the US. The two locations embody disparate histories of immigration. Britain, the center of the old empire, has been home since the second world war of communities from the former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia, migrating to Britain to fill labor shortages, continuing to live on and make Britain their home, even in the face of massive anti-immigration propaganda and legislation. The history of immigration in the United States, and specifically in the case of Sidhwa, the history of South Asian immigration in the United States, which is the framing context of Sidhwa's work, is different and more complex, and this distinction must be made in considering her fiction along with Rushdie's. These two literary practitioners are allied in their

common link with the Indian subcontinent as the originating point of their migratory journeys, but their fictional worlds interact, for the most part, with two distinct social milieus, while sharing some similarities.

Besides being contemporaries, that is producing their fiction in the same decades, Sidhwa grapples like Rushdie with questions of postcolonial history, nationalism and diaspora, and the question of the intellectual in these issues as they are played out in the literary/cultural genre of the novel. Although, located in different diasporic contexts, and differing in their individual aesthetic choices, they are both South Asian migrant novelists, living and writing their novels in the last decades of the twentieth century and moreover, they are both attracted to the mid century history of the struggle for independence, and the impact of Partition on the post-independent histories of India and Pakistan.

In discussing Bapsi Sidhwa's fiction in connection with the question of the postcolonial migrant intellectual, I will first trace Sidhwa's critical engagement with nationalism in the context of the legacy of communal carnage unleashed by Partition. Like in Rushdie, Sidhwa's explorations of the questions of nationalism and ethnic conflict converge and get explicitly foregrounded in the figure of the woman. After tracing the complicated positioning of gender in nationalism, I will move to the question of gender in the South Asian diaspora in the United States. Here, I will trace the role of gender in the construction of the American model minority identity. This exploration of gender in the constructions of nationalist and diasporic identities will be complicated by the question of class in each instance, and the class hiatus between intellectual and mass migrancy. In the final section of the chapter, I will try to explore

the possibilities of feminist and/or subaltern resistance glimpsed at in Sidhwa's fiction. I argue, however, that the class gap between female migrant intellectual and the female mass migrant is only bridged sporadically and temporarily in evocations of the folk or the carnivalesque. Finally in creating a transition from South Asian to African intellectuals, I prepare the ground for the next stage of my argument, which is the task of reimagining solidarities between intellectuals and postcolonial societies by renegotiating the boundaries of their separations and refashioning the postcolonial novel. In this endeavor, I turn to Buchi Emecheta's fiction in the next chapter, placed in the social world of Black Britain and finally to the fiction of Ngugi wa Thiong'o in the concluding chapter. Between the two African migrant novelists, like the two South Asian ones in my selection, my discussion will oscillate between diasporic and national postcolonial realities. In Buchi Emecheta's fiction particularly, the blurring of geographic boundaries, in the specific consideration of the predicament of Nigerian women, finds a parallel in the blurring of the temporal boundaries by the insistent presence of the pre-modern in the modern in the structures operating on women's lives. Ngugi's insistence on national languages of Africa and his commitment to his native Kenya further destabilizes distinctions between national and diasporic intellectual formations. National location is not automatically a sign of social engagement, just as diasporic location is not automatically a sign of cosmopolitan privilege.

Having provided a brief framework of the position of this chapter in the context of the whole work, I shall now turn to the question of gender in Bapsi Sidhwa's novels. Unlike, Salman Rushdie, in whose novels the question of gender

seems to be hidden layer of a palimpsest, the most apparent ones, or ones which have attracted the most attention are nationalism, diasporic identity, secularism and the aesthetic of hybridity, gender in the depiction of South Asian nationalism is explicitly foregrounded in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa. Her novel *Cracking India*, published also under the title of *The Ice Candy Man* deliberately foregrounds the gendered nature of ethnic conflicts and the centrality of gender in the construction of nationalist discourses.

Deepika Bahri in a special issue of the journal *Interventions* has pointed out that Bapsi Sidhwa's novel is the first Partition novel written by a female author from the point of view of a female child,¹¹ and depicting the costs of Partition on the female subaltern. This comment is true if we limit the representation of Partition to the Anglophone South Asian novel. There exists an incredibly rich tradition of writing on the Partition in India's native languages, particularly Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, and Bengali depicting the bloody costs of fragmenting territories along the lines of religion. Sadat Hasan Manto, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Bhisham Sahani, Khuswant Singh, among male writers and Quratulain Hyder, Ismat Chughtai, Attia Hossain, Umme Ummara, Krishna Sobti, Lalthambika Antharjanam, and Jamila Hashmi among women writers predate Sidhwa in their representations of the costs of ethnic conflict registered on the bodies of women. Among the authors, I mentioned, Khuswant Singh and Attia Hossain write their fictional narratives of Partition in English. This rich literary outpouring on Partition took place in the early decades

¹¹ The question of children is very significant to the Partition narrative. Not only were children the target of communal carnage, as Menon and Bhasin's and Butalia's studies of Partition reveal children born to women as a result of rape and abduction became a contentious issue in the question of the resettlement and recovery of these women.

following decolonization in what may be seen as an act of cathartic release from the collective trauma and shame of the bloodbath and violations. Bapsi Sidhwa may be seen to be a first in that she returns to the question of Partition a generation later, in her 1988 novel, (*Cracking India* originally appearing as the *The Ice-Candy Man*), at a time when the tortured memory of Partition seems to have been relegated to relative oblivion. Moreover, she returns to the question of Partition from the perspective of an outsider, a South Asian Parsee woman whose community had sidestepped the Hindu Muslim religious conflict by its autonomous neutrality, and who is now an immigrant in the United States. Sidhwa's novel represents a revisiting of the episode of Partition, at a time of renewed historical and sociological interest in this holocaust after a very sketchy recording of this narrative in official Indian historiography. The work of anthropologist Veena Das, and feminist oral historians Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, and Kamala Bhasin are examples of scholarly attempts in the 1990s to express complex layers of women's experiences of Partition. In that sense, Sidhwa's novelistic depiction of Partition parallels the work of anthropologists like Veena Das and Ritu Menon who have tried to reverse the official historic silence on this holocaust by reclaiming the oral testimonies of communities affected by the ethnic riots, and women who were abducted and raped on both sides of the border.

Veena Das in her famous essay "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain" writes, "In the literary imagination of India, the violence of Partition was about inscribing desire on the bodies of women in a manner that we have not yet understood. In the mythic imagination in India, victory or defeat in war was ultimately inscribed on the bodies of women"(Das 82). Thus rape in Partition

exemplifies the “intimate connection” of sexuality in the construction of nationalism. Das traces the origin of the equation of a woman’s body and its violation to nationalist violation in the colonial depictions of rape in narratives of rape following the Sepoy Mutiny ¹²

The more complex and fractured aspect of women's experience of Partition is represented in the experience of abduction which often accompanied or preceded rape and was followed by sale or prostitution and sometimes by marriage to the abductors and the formation of new ties or family identities. This process of emotional recovery after communal warfare, however tenuous, was further disrupted by the policies of the new states, India and Pakistan, in the passage of the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of 1949. The recent research of Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin in *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* documents the obsessive involvement of political leaders in the enactment of this legislation. In the following speeches by Nehru and Gandhi, we can trace the rhetoric of national honor and its symbolic location in women's bodies and the need to restore honor through a reclaiming of the abducted women.

In a letter to Evan Jenkins, Nehru wrote

There is one point, however, to which I should like to draw your attention, and this is the question of rescuing women who have been abducted or forcibly converted. You will realize that nothing adds to popular passions more than stories of abduction of women, and so long these . . . women are not rescued , trouble will simmer and might blaze out.(Qtd in Menon and Bhasin 68)

¹² See Jenny Sharpe's discussion of the construction of the discourse of rape in *Allegories of Empire*

Menon and Bhasin document another excerpt from Nehru, this time a public appeal through newspapers in 1946 in which he said

I am told that there is an unwillingness on the part of their relatives to accept those girls and women (who have been abducted) back to their homes. This is a most objectionable and wrong attitude to take and any social custom that supports this attitude must be condemned. These girls and women require our tender and loving care and their relatives should be proud to take them back and give them every help. (Nehru Qtd in Menon and Bhasin 99).

In another excerpt, Menon and Bhasin give us a glimpse of Gandhi's thinking on this issue.

I hear women have this objection that the Hindus are not willing to accept back the recovered women because they say that they have become impure. I feel that this is a matter of great shame. That woman is as pure as the girls who are sitting by my side. And if any one of those recovered women should come to me, then I will give them as much respect and honor as I accord to these young maidens. (Gandhi Qtd. in Menon and Bhasin 99).

In these excerpts, both Nehru and Gandhi seem to privilege the idea of the restoration of abducted women and their acceptance into society as honorable and untainted by the sexual violence perpetrated on them. While Nehru's tone seems to reproduce the language of the benevolent nation-state committed to the welfare of its women, Gandhi's rhetoric is much more intimate and personal, treating this as a personal

moral and ethical challenge. Both excerpts reveal the psychic investment of the new nation on the bodies of women. It should be mentioned that Gandhi's relationship with nationalism and gender is extremely complex. Feminist scholars who have studied the impact of Gandhian thought on the women's movement in India, point out that Gandhian satyagraha provided the catalyst for the mobilization of many women for the nationalist cause and paving their transition from the domestic into the public sphere. However, Meena Alexander points out in her description of the incident of Gandhi cutting off the hair of young women, he had thought to be inciting the sexual misconduct of some boys in Tolstoy Farm, "But even as women were freed for political action, the female body had to bear a pitiful burden of repressed desire and the pain of withdrawn sexuality" (*The Shock of Arrival* 182). Ketu Katrack points out that Gandhi's philosophy of passive resistance drew on essentialized notions of women as capable of the virtues of chastity and suffering, from figures in Hindu mythology like Sita and Savitri. Gandhi valorized these attributes of Indian womanhood and harnessed them for the nationalist cause. He also consciously self-fashioned and presented himself in a traditionally feminine posture, a figure spinning on a wheel, and as a mother figure for the nation. However, Gandhi excluded an important dimension of women's experience, their sexual identities. Katrack notes, "This problematic denial of female sexuality, equating sexual abstinence with nobility and service, seems like a projection of Gandhi's personal conflicts between sex and service, between personal passion and public work"(399). Thus in the quoted excerpt, too there is a privileging of the chastity of a woman's body and its symbolic equation with the sanctity of a nation.

Menon and Bhasin document the unprecedented zeal with which the new governments embarked on the recovery operations, galvanizing social workers and the border police. More importantly their research reveals the opposition the provisions of this act met with, from abducted women who did not wish to return to their pre-Partition families. The authorities did not acknowledge any of these protests and went about carrying out their prescribed tasks, single-mindedly. It did not matter that the former families of the abducted women saw them as defiled and ostracized them. The state preferred to institute ashrams or homes for the recovered women, rather than let them remain on the wrong sides of the borders.

The question of recovery became very complex when it encompassed the fate of children born in mixed religion unions. Children were deemed to belong to the fathers, and hence abducted women had to leave children born of their former captors behind when they were rescued, and these children became wards of the state. In the case of pregnant women the Indian state and its social workers actively encouraged abortions, at a time when it was an illegal act. In the case of advanced pregnancies, which could not be aborted, children were separated from their mothers, since the chances of the pre-Partition families of accepting just the mother were significantly higher than a mother with a child of mixed ethnicity. All these details of the predicament of women in Partition points to the fact that no simplistic view of rape and recovery as the antitheses of each other is tenable in the context of the Indian Partition. Menon and Bhasin justifiably ask the question:

What connects the brutal and deliberate communal sexual violence against women to the desperate but no less deliberate doing to death of

them by their own kinsmen? What links these two, in turn, to the equally deliberate and no less violent actions of the state in its apparently benign programme of recovery? What connects them in our view, is a powerful consensus on the subject of violence against women (Menon and Bhasin 58).

Although many political histories of Partition were written, there were hardly any attempts to preserve the testimonies of survivors, or even to interview them. This is because the social codes of silence demand the erasure of memories, which are symbolic of the loss of the community's honor. Ritu Menon in her essay in *Interventions* opines that with the censorship and erasure of the history and experiences of the survivors, fiction or imaginary narratives of rape and abduction became an only available mode of preserving this harrowing history.¹³

Following this theoretical framework Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India* becomes an alternative feminist rendition of the Partition narrative of rape, communal violence and recovery. Seen in this way, Sidhwa's project of creating this fictional account is an attempt at breaking free from the official taboo of silence and censorship which has structured the historical rendition of this episode. However, the literary endeavor of Bapsi Sidhwa, and the project of the preservation of the testimonies of the survivors undertaken by Ritu Menon and Urvashi Butalia cannot be conflated. The representation of rape in Sidhwa's Partition novel is complicated by the ambiguity introduced by class. I consider the role of Shanta Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* as not only a Hindu woman, working in a Parsee household

¹³ Gyan Pandey's essay "In Defence of the Fragment" advocates alternate historiographic practices for writing the history of Partition.

who is abducted by a Muslim mob, but as a woman who is a nanny and therefore a domestic laborer in a bourgeois household. Her capture by the mob is made possible by the accidental betrayal of her hideout by her charge, Lenny. Her mistress is powerless in intervening against the mob that drags her away. Later Lenny's Mother and Godmother do succeed in recovering her from the red light district and arranging for her journey to India to be re-united with her relatives. Thus, I would like to resist the collapsing of Sidhwa's Partition novel with the work of the anthropologists and oral historians who are involved in reversing the silence around rape and abduction by collecting oral testimonies. This Partition novel does not present an account of Partition violence as a movement from victimhood to recovery in an uncomplicated manner. This is not to suggest that oral testimonies do not point to complexities of Partition experience. However the form of the novel is heteroglossic in Bakhtin's sense and thus it can incorporate multiple languages of the social world, presenting elite and non-elite perspectives on Partition. It is because of this that it is possible to read this particular novelistic representation of Partition as enabling a perspective on violence which goes beyond the existing paradigm of ethnic conflict being played out on the bodies of women. *Cracking India* highlights the fact that ethnic violence too, is disproportionately experienced by those who are the least privileged along the hierarchy of class. Also by presenting two contrasting representations of the middle class wife and the working class nanny, Sidhwa's novel while narrating a story of Partition also narrates the creation of the new norm of womanhood for the new nation patriarchy. Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha, in their Introduction to *Women Writing in*

India: 600 B.C. to the Present, have described this phenomenon of the creation of the new norm of the respectable woman:

Increasingly over the nineteenth century the respectability of women from the emerging middle classes was being defined in counterpoint to the 'crude and licentious' behavior of lower class women. Decent (middle class) women were warned against unseemly interaction with lower-class women and against the corrupting influence of the wandering women singers and dancers whose performances were laced with a bawdy and healthy disrespect for authority (9).

Cracking India depicts the transition from a more diffuse, sexually open, less codified structure of gender roles, represented in the scenes in Lahore's Queen's Park in the interactions among the working class characters, to the hegemonic rise of the idea of the new respectable woman.¹⁴ The hybrid form of the novel *Cracking India* is able to encapsulate the non-elite world of Ayah's friends in Queen's Park that constantly parodies the world of bourgeois politics. Although this world and its centering character, the beautiful and desirable Ayah, are destroyed, in recording this world the novel presents an alternative to bourgeois nationalism with an alternative norm of gender relations, which implicitly critiques the values of elite nationalism prevailing in the world of the text and the new nation outside.

Thus, Sidhwa's deft use of the novelistic form in *Cracking India* is able to offer an insight into the complexity of the position of rape in the Partition story. Unlike collections of oral history, a Partition novel, even one ostensibly conforming

¹⁴ See Partha Chatterjee's discussion of the rise of the ideal of the *bhadramahila* (respectable woman) in nationalist discourses in *The Nation and its Fragments*

to the conventions of realism, is not just an attempt to fill in the blank spaces of history. The novel unlike conventional or oral history is not just a straightforward recreation of a historic milieu. It can be thought of as a multi-layered palimpsest, gesturing at several different threads in the complex motivations and facts, which comprise Partition. The meshing of these disparate threads and their unraveling leads us to more tenuous and yet more complicated conclusions than the works of oral historians, however sensitively and painstakingly they are undertaken.

The plot of the novel, *Cracking India*, involves Ayah, a nanny in a bourgeois Parsee household in Lahore at the time of Partition. Ayah is a beautiful Hindu woman who takes care of Lenny, an eight-year-old girl child affected with polio. Ayah attracts many suitors, the two most in pursuit of her are Ice-Candy Man and Masseur. As the political events of Partition invade the domestic space of the Sethi household, there is a polarization of Ayah's friends around the lines of religion. The polyglot, tolerant atmosphere of Lahore changes with rumors of ethnic slaughter. Death trains carrying massacred bodies arrive from the east. One train contains the corpses of Ice Candy Man's sisters. Masseur is found killed and stuffed in a sack in front of the Sethi household. The Hindu and Sikh neighbors flee Lahore. Then, in the climactic moment in the novel, Ice Candy Man leads a mob of men into the Sethi household, demanding revenge on the Hindu servants, particularly Ayah. Lenny's Mother hides Ayah inside, Imam Din the elderly and respected Muslim swears in the name of Allah that Ayah has left for Amritsar. However Lenny, trusting Ayah's former paramour Ice-Candy Man, reveals that she is inside the house. The mob marches in, drags Ayah out, and

takes her away on a cart, amidst her screaming protests and Lenny and her mother's mute paralysis.

Later, Lenny's Mother becomes involved in humanitarian relief work, supplying departing families with rationed gas and rescuing women who have been abducted. Godmother and Mother are able to find Ayah, after she has become a prostitute in Heera Mandi, Lahore's red light district, and they rescue her from Ice Candy Man and send her across the border to Amritsar. Lenny gets another Ayah, Hamida, who is also a rescued woman. In another episode, we also witness the massacre of Imam Din's cousin's Muslim village of Pir Pindo by Sikh militants. Ranna, a child and former companion of Lenny, survives the carnage and is able to reach Lahore.

The disparate strands of the Partition experience appear in *Cracking India* by the different points of view represented. The largest part of the action is rendered through the first person narrative of Lenny. She ostensibly represents a child's perspective on the violent incidents. However, there are temporal shifts in the narrative voice between the consciousness of a child and that of an adult. In fact, Lenny is far too precocious in the novel, to ever be thought of as just a child, unmediated by an adult consciousness. More than her role of a child, or her Parsee ethnicity, both of which have been read by critics like Deepika Bahri, as markers of an unbiased neutral perspective on the religious divide, it is Lenny's role as witness and voyeur, that I find most intriguing.

It is through Lenny's observations that we are introduced to the world of Lahore. It is through her access to the world of her middle class family, and the social

world of Ayah, that we have intimate knowledge of the bourgeois and the urban proletariat, the public and the private arenas. Furthermore, Lenny is the witness/participant in several of Ayah's sexual interludes, and she is also the witness/actor of Ayah's final capture by the mob. In the abduction scene Lenny and her Mother are both participants in and witnesses of the violence. By analyzing Lenny and her mother's roles through the class and gender structure of the household and through attention to their voyeurism, I would like to resist the dominant narrative's attempt to posit them as victims and innocent bystanders to the violence. Instead, I want to be attentive to elements in the novel which gesture towards the intermingling of pleasure and power in acts of gazing at sexual intimacies, as well as violence. I view the many acts of voyeurism that Lenny is involved in to be a part of a continuum of sexual experiences that Lenny, prepubescent child, and her mother, a middle class wife with limited sexual choices, enjoy vicariously through the less restrictive sexual opportunities available to Ayah. Ultimately, Lenny's position as a voyeur is one of power, and it is an extension of the power both she and her mother wield over Ayah because of the relationship they inhabit as mistress and servant. They become unwilling witnesses to Ayah's subjection to mob violence, but once again their position as onlookers, "voyeurs," and their religious and class difference protect them from falling prey to the same violence. They can be distant from the violent incident and gaze at Ayah's transformation into a target of ethnic violence just as Lenny's gaze had transformed Ayah to an object of sexual pleasure. There is something even more questionable in their benevolent action of the rescue of Ayah. The very silence of Ayah, after her abduction and her acquiescence to Godmother and

Mother's plans to repatriate her, trigger memories of the protests of many women for whom this was symptomatic of yet another violation of their desires. Ambreen Hai, has read Ayah's expulsion from the new nation of Pakistan, as representing the limits of postcolonial feminism.¹⁵

Bifurcating the novel, *Cracking India*, in a less overt way than the Hindu Muslim divide, is the line of class which splits female identity in the bourgeois household, into the mistress and the nanny. Anne McClintock writes about this in the context of Victorian society, in *Imperial Leather*. She uses Eric Hobsbawm's conceptualization "the widest definition of the middle class . . . as that of keeping domestic servants" (85), to identify the Victorian bourgeoisie. McClintock argues that "The Victorian splitting of women into whores and Madonnas, nuns and prostitutes has its origins, then not in universal archetype, but in the class structure of the household" (87). This particular splitting of female subjectivity along class lines finds a parallel in the Parsee household in 1940s India. McClintock's description of "children who grew up with two or more mothers whom they learned to distinguish by reading the social scripts of class difference," is certainly applicable to Lenny's experience of being mothered by Ayah in addition to her biological mother. McClintock further elaborates this split by describing working class women as those who are often represented as "biologically driven to lechery and excess" and upper class women as "indifferent to the deliriums of the flesh. Mothers were often the objects of remote adoration and abstract awe." Sidhwa's novel seems to inherit this

¹⁵ Ambreen Hai's essay "Border Work, Border Trouble: Postcolonial Feminism and the Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*" argues that the ending of the novel, which charts the expulsion of the Hindu Ayah from Pakistan, marks a failure to imagine solidarities between women of different classes and religions.

Victorian attitude to female sexuality and replicate it in the heightened sexuality in the presentation of Ayah, as opposed to a more cerebral representation of Lenny's mother. In a way Sidhwa's novel seems to be reproducing the norm of Victorian womanhood of the beautiful Englishwoman who was idle and who had servants to work for her, in the representation of Lenny's mother. Inderpal Grewal has elaborated in *Home and Harem* the contrasting sexualities of the bourgeois Englishwoman and women of "other," colonized lands:

Yet the important difference presented to English readers was that the bourgeois Englishwoman's leisure was combined with a nonsexual morality of wifedom and motherhood, while 'exotic' women were believed to be sensual with a sexuality that was seldom represented as being connected with motherhood. The discourse of race was thus refracted through that of labor. Whereas, the married, middle-class Englishwoman was thought of as being uninterested in anything erotic, the woman of Asia was endowed with all the sensuality that the Victorian period repressed in its own culture but that it thought available in women of the lower classes and of 'Southern lands' (45).

Even though, the depiction of Lenny's Mother is not an asexual one, she is certainly not the center of the erotic attention in the novel. In the visual imagery of the novel Ayah's physical vigor, robustness and sexuality are in sharp contrast to the fragility of Lenny's mother and Lenny's own physical handicap of polio. Time and again we are reminded of Ayah's chocolate brown, plump and round body, especially her "bouncy walk" and the "half spheres beneath her short sari-blouses" (13). In sharp

contrast, Mother is slender, fragile, “her cheekbones framed by a jaw as delicately oval as an egg . . . such chiseled beauty is overwhelmed by an exuberant quality of her innocence”(50).

This physical schematization of Ayah’s rotund earthiness and Mother’s delicate fragility contrasts with activities that we see both these characters to be performing in their everyday lives. Mother’s activities include entertaining, chatting with father during lunch, driving around in the Morris. Ayah’s day as it is depicted in the novel seems to revolve around the whirlwind courtships of her various suitors conducted mostly at Lahore’s Queen’s Park. Her labor is almost invisible and only presents itself at moments of crisis or rupture. Early in the novel, when Lenny is being treated by Colonel Bharucha for polio, Mother is tormented by guilt and confesses “It’s my fault . . . I neglected her—left her to the care of ayahs”(25). It is at moments like this that Ayah’s invisible labor of rearing Lenny, a special needs child suffering from polio, becomes visible to the reader.

Ayah is the center around which the working class characters of the novel like Massuer, Ice Candy Man, Imam Din, Sharbat Khan, Hari, Moti, and others form a community. Their interactions take place mostly in the outdoor space of Lahore’s Queen’s Park, distinct from the middle class Sethi family that interacts with its acquaintances indoors. As rumors of the impending Partition begin to circulate in Lahore, Sidhwa presents both bourgeois and proletariat responses to the imminent political crisis. At a dinner in the Sethi household, the conversation becomes an intense confrontation between Mr. Singh’s demand for Swaraj, and the Englishman

Inspector General Rogers' paternalistic prophecy of political disaster once the colonial administration withdraws:

Inspector General Rogers recovers his Imperial Phlegm. "My dear man," he intones, "Don't you know the Congress won't agree to a single issue with the Muslim League? The Cabinet Mission proposed a Federation of the Hindu and Muslim majority provinces. Jinnah accepted it; Nehru and Gandhi didn't . . . Those arrogant Hindus have blown the last chance for an undivided India (*Cracking India* 71).

This is a reiteration of an official political interpretation of Partition, perhaps more representative of a Pakistani point of view. In Sidhwa's depiction of the political discussions occurring within the bourgeois household, she reproduces colonialist and nationalist perspectives on the unfolding drama of independence, underscoring the limitations of nationalist leaders to come to a consensus to prevent the fracture of the country they were fighting to liberate.

In the world of the urban proletariat, there is an equally intense preoccupation with the fate of India's independence. However the language in which this is conducted is strikingly different from the conversations within the Sethi household. In these discussions, over which Ayah often presides and in which Lenny participates because of her dependence on Ayah, there is an unabashed and savage parody of elite leaders and an irreverence in discussing their actions. Lenny, as the narrator displays this satirical tone in her account of meeting Gandhi, for example. Lenny reproduces a part of Gandhi's lecture:

“Sluggish stomachs are the scourge of Punjabis . . . too much rich food and too little exercise. The cause of India's ailments lies in our clogged alimentary canals” (95).

Lenny goes on to narrate Gandhi's advice to her mother, about enemas:

“Look at these girls,” says Gandhijee, indicating the lean women flanking him “I give them enemas myself—there is no shame in it—I am like their mother. You can see how smooth and moist their skin is”(Cracking India 96). This representation of Gandhi draws on Gandhi's own self- presentation as a feminine figure and a mother. However, it reconfigures facts about his dietary and personal habits to demystify his sacrosanct image in Indian history and to satirize him.

Similarly, other statesmen like Nehru and Mountbatten are also parodied in a conversation amongst the crowd in Queen's Park:

What's the new Lat Sahib like? This Mountbatten Sahib?" asks Ayah.

She, like Mother is an oil pourer." I saw his photo. He is handsome! But I don't like his wife, *baba*. She looks like a *choorali*!"

“Ah but Jawaharlal Nehru likes her. He likes her *vaary much*!” says Ice -candy-man., luridly dragging out the last two words of English.

“Nehru and Mountbatten are like this!” the gardener concurs holding up two entwined fingers(*Cracking India* 99).

It is important to emphasize that these parodic perspectives on elite politics draw on grotesque imagery, with its emphasis on bodily functions, eating, sex, and excretion. Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* has traced the genealogy of these expressions of the grotesque to the medieval tradition of the carnivalesque, which aimed at satirizing the world of authority. Sidhwa's novel can be read as displaying

elements of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, the multiplicity of languages circulating in the social world. Bakhtin describes the genre of the novel as a “phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice” (*The Dialogic Imagination* 261). Bakhtin conceives of the novel as “a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” (*Dialogic* 262). *Cracking India*, in its representation of official colonialist and nationalist perspectives of Partition as well as non-elite, parodic and subversive perspectives on elite politics, can be said to be weaving multiple discourses on nationalism into an aesthetic form. I have tried to demonstrate multiple perspectives on Partition, hoping to show that this novel incorporates social heteroglossia and displays a process of dialogism in its incorporation of elite and non-elite perspectives on the Partition.

Although *Cracking India* demonstrates the dialogic relationship of elite and subaltern versions of nationalist politics, the novel also charts the ascendancy of the bourgeois ideology and the gradual erosion of the vibrant world of the urban proletariat. This is dramatized through the transformation of Ayah, from an active member of this non-elite community, in fact, the pivotal member of this group, to a mute and helpless victim of Partition violence and a voiceless person recovered after the traumatic event. In the novel, Ayah’s body is represented as an object of sexual desire. This sexualized representation deflects attention from her body as the source of labor for the smooth functioning of the bourgeois household. The transformation that takes place after her abduction, the change from nanny to prostitute, the change from the commodification and exchange of her labor (child-care) to the

commodification of her body for sexual exchange is prefigured in the logic of novelistic representation. For example, during her brief courtship with the Chinaman, the Sethi household gets inundated with silk doilies, gifts that the Chinaman bestows on her for her sexual attentions. She uses these to decorate her space of work, the Sethi household. The borders of waged domestic labor (child-care) and sex work, or the exchange of goods for sex, blur even before Ayah becomes a prostitute at Heera Mandi. With the Chinaman, sexual favors become exchangeable for luxury goods, it is only a change from barter to a cash economy in Heera Mandi, Lahore's red light district.

If Ayah's labor of childcare, as well as her witty and satirical comments on bourgeois politics, disappears from the representative scheme of the novel, what continues to be foregrounded through out is her sexuality. And we see this through the voyeuristic gaze of the child narrator Lenny. Lenny's initiation into knowledge of sexuality is through her position as a voyeur gazing at Ayah's body in the course of her courtships with various suitors. Anne McClintock, in describing Victorian fascination with photographs of working women, writes, "Voyeurism dramatizes the violation of a threshold: the keyhole, the window, the camera aperture. Voyeurism acknowledges a barrier to pleasure, a limit to power and then transgresses the limit, reclaiming power in a forbidden excess of pleasure. Indeed the fact that an act is forbidden makes it pleasurable"(129). The acts of voyeurism in the text re-inscribe Lenny and her mother's power over Ayah's life, by transforming her into a sexual object for their gaze. Later their gaze frames her as an object of violence. They

remain powerless in breaking free from the structure of this gaze and reclaiming Ayah from becoming an object on which mob violence is wreaked.

One of the first things we note about Lenny, the narrator of *Cracking India* is her precocity. She is ostensibly an eight-year-old child narrator, but she inhabits a liminal space between childhood and adult consciousness, between innocence and experience, and between the present and the past. Lenny is most easily seen as inhabiting this border zone because of her religious identity as a Parsee, outside the religious conflict of Partition. However, this is not the only dimension of her in-between situation.

Nowhere is this liminal space she inhabits more emphatically exposed than in the moments she gazes at the sexual encounters of Ayah; and her narratorial voice frames the readers of the text as complicit in the transgressive pleasure of voyeurism. It is through Lenny's voyeuristic gaze that we are introduced to Ayah's various suitors, particularly the two most favored ones, Ice Candy Man and Masseur. At the most obvious level, the abduction scene brings to a climax the triangular love story between Ayah, Masseur and Ice Candy Man. Ice Candy Man is rejected by Ayah in favor Masseur, and so he extracts his revenge by leading the Muslim mob, in abducting and raping her, in the established pattern of ethnic revenge by the rape and possession of women of the "outside" religion/ ethnicity.

However this erotic triangle and its jealousies intersect with the less obvious but nevertheless ever present triangle of Lenny, Ayah, and her suitor/s. It is through her role as voyeur, her privileged access to Ayah's sexual intimacies, that Lenny learns about adult sexuality. What distinguishes Lenny's role is the fact that she is not an

inactive onlooker. In fact, she once again occupies a liminal space between observer and participant.

In an early scene between Ayah and Masseur, Lenny narrates:

I take advantage of Ayah's admirers. " Massage me" I demand kicking the handsome masseur . . . taking a few drops of almond oil from one of the bottles in his cruet set, he massages my wasted leg and then my okay leg. His fingers work deftly, kneading, pummeling, soothing. They are knowing fingers, very clever and sometimes, late in the evening, when he and Ayah and I are alone, they massage Ayah under her sari. Her lids close. She grows still and languid. A pearly wedge gleams between her lips and she moans, a fragile piteous sound of pleasure (*Cracking India* 28).

In this passage there is a quick and almost deliberate shift from Lenny to Ayah as the recipient of Masseur's attentions. When Ayah reaches sexual climax, Lenny almost seems to share in the pleasure, as a kind of vicarious experience of lovemaking. In a similar vein, in the encounters with Ice-candy man too, there is a blurring of distinctions between Ayah and Lenny, as recipients of his sexual advances:

Things love to crawl beneath Ayah's sari. Ladybirds, glow-worms, Ice-Candy Man's toes. She dusts them off with impartial nonchalance. I keep an eye on Ice-Candy Man's toes. Sometimes in the course of an engrossing story, they travel so cautiously that both *Ayah and I* are taken unawares. (*Cracking India* 29) (my emphasis).

Here too Lenny's narrative complicates her identity in between the categories of adult and child, and voyeur and actor. In a conversation with Cousin, Lenny declares her attraction for Masseur. It is perhaps possible to do a psychoanalytic reading of Lenny's dependent relationship and identification with Ayah, and her need to assert her identity by killing off Ayah, in a reconfiguration of the Freudian family romance. However, I think it would be only a partial analysis of the complexity of the abduction scene. By emphasizing Lenny's hybrid formation as an adult/ child, I would like to read against the novel's most visible framing of this episode of as a dramatization of the innocence of childhood, falling prey to the treacherous politics of the adult world. Lenny is too complex a figure, and so far from a Romantic image of the innocent child, that this hypothesis is an inadequate explanation for what happens. Even within the novel, there are questionings of this overt paradigm, and a gesturing towards deeper psychological motivations. Here is Lenny's own description of the reaction that her betrayal evokes in Sharbat Khan, one of Ayah's suitors, who was absent from the abduction scene: "sometimes he looks at me as if he is trying to probe my soul and search out the aberrations in my personality that made me betray Ayah" (204).

The space of the motley crowd of Ayah's admirers, the world of the urban working class marked by its irreverence for bourgeois values, is destroyed by erotic jealousies between the Ice Candy Man and Masseur over their contest of Ayah. However, the catalyst for the ultimate transformation of the loving, bantering crowd to the fierce, hateful mob is provided by the accidental betrayal by Lenny of Ayah's whereabouts. The betrayal is complicated by the fact that Lenny's mother, is another

actor in the scene, the employer who is unable to secure the safety of her servant against the mob.

Although Mother and Ayah do not share the intimacy Lenny and Ayah do, it is possible to see them as rivals much more easily than Lenny and Ayah. The rivalry can be one over Lenny, but more plausibly it can be thought of as a contest for ascendancy in the sexual landscape of the novel. Ayah is obviously the center of the novel's erotic action, and Mother a pale shadow by contrast. Mother's only sexual interlude is with Father, within the conscripted space of the middle class marriage. There is none of the sexual promiscuity and license, which Ayah enjoys with her crowd of lovers. If anything, Mother has to use her sexuality to extort money from Father. I consider Ayah's promiscuity, as well as her independence to represent a threat to the norm of monogamous heterosexuality, in the new nation patriarchy, and hence it is banished from the domestic space and the borders of the new nation of Pakistan.

By introducing class as a criterion in the examination of the crucial abduction scene, I am trying to prevent the foreclosure of this scene as an episode of ethnic rivalry scripted on the body of a woman. I am resisting the reading, encouraged by the narrator's voice, which casts Lenny and her Mother as victims. The text, being multi-layered, as I suggested earlier, gestures at alternative analyses of Lenny's betrayal. Lenny's mother's passivity in the abduction scene is juxtaposed in the novel, against her extremely active role in helping to transport refugees by supplying families with rationed fuel. Lenny had gazed at the burning of Lahore earlier, and narrated "I stare at the tamasha, mesmerized by the spectacle. It is like a gigantic

fireworks display . . .” (*Cracking India* 147), suggesting the interweaving of pleasure in the spectacle of violence. Just as the voyeur partakes of the sexual pleasure of an erotic spectacle, the spectator of violence is also complicit in the workings of cruelty and pleasure. The pervasive savagery and sadism is shown to affect everyone, including Lenny, most remarkably in the episode, immediately following the burning of Lahore, in which she mutilates her dolls.

Urvashi Butalia in *The Other Side of Silence* writes about the selective memorializing of partition. Women are remembered as martyrs, but not as negotiators, runaways, and participants in violent acts. Butalia refuses to accept the ritualistic celebration of women who committed mass suicides, to escape sexual violation, as martyrs, by interrogating their complicity in coercing perhaps, other reluctant members of their sex to perpetrate violence on themselves.

The power of *Cracking India* is that it can gesture at myriad terrors of that convulsive time. For example, the episode of Hari’s conversion, which is a strategic one, performed without any violent intimidation, gestures at the horrors and humiliations of forceful conversions, and circumcisions. The juxtaposition of the marriage of Papoo, the child of the sweeper Moti and a friend of Lenny’s, after Ayah’s forced abduction, points to the thin line separating marriage and rape in that turbulent violent time. Papoo’s socially sanctioned marriage is as great an outrage as Ayah’s abduction because she is a child who is married off forcibly to a middle-aged man, and drugged through the ceremony, which is a Christian one, but contrary to instituting social reform, perpetuates the atrocities of Hindu child- marriage. The

episode of Ice-Candy Man's exhibitionism recalls horrific episodes of women made to parade naked in temples and gurdwaras.

A novel also has the ability to refashion history, rewrite it with imaginative license. The mass suicides of women is imagined and located in Pir Pindo, the Muslim village of another child, Ranna, by Sidhwa, rather than in honor-coded Hindu society. The repatriation efforts were most zealous in India, but Sidhwa maps the efforts in Lahore, reversing the perception that India was somehow more honorable and civilized by returning larger numbers of women. Feminist histories reveal that India was in fact much more ruthless and silencing of the abducted women's choices. Projecting itself as secular and progressive, the project of rescue was often a veiled attempt to re-establish ethnic and religious borders by a physical relocation of women's bodies on the right side of ethnic boundaries. Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin document in their work *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, that while continuing to be zealous in returning and reclaiming abducted women, the Indian State encouraged the exclusion of children of mixed marriages, by promoting abortions of mixed union fetuses.

The powerlessness of Lenny's mother and Lenny's accidental betrayal contrasts with the agency of Godmother in rescuing Ayah from prostitution, and repatriating her to Amritsar. Godmother can be seen as the third in the triumvirate of women who mother Lenny. She is however, much closer to Mother than Ayah in her class affiliation. Although in this novel, Ayah is happy to be rescued by Godmother, this text can be read in conjunction with various Partition rescue accounts, which report that rehabilitation efforts often replicated the first act of violence and

dislocation by the forceful restoration of abducted women to their pre-Partition families, without allowing them any voice in the decision making process. I want to suggest that Lenny and her mother's failures and Godmother's success are part of a continuum extending from middle class women's unexamined exploitation of female workers to the top down model of middle class feminist activism. This mode of feminist intervention also parallels the Indian middle class's abandonment of working class hopes in the decolonization struggle. Renewed academic attention on the South Asian Partition must grapple with the complexity of class in exploring ways of reversing female victimhood. *Cracking India* gives us the picture of the world of Lahore's Queen's Park and its community of working class people, their freedoms, laughter, and their refusal to accept elite narratives of nationalism. Although this world is destroyed, its existence within the text can be interpreted as an evanescent utopian moment of a more inclusive and egalitarian version of nationalism, which scholarly, artistic, and political work might try to reclaim.

Unmasking Mythologies: South Asian Migrants, Model Minorities and Model Women in *An American Brat*

It is perhaps a critical commonplace to mention that Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* has been generally relegated to relative oblivion, just at the same time when *Cracking India* has captured a large readership in the US. The fact that the book has gained more visibility after Deepa Mehta's film *Earth*, may explain this partially. But why has this novel generally been categorized as her lesser artistic achievement and is no longer available in print, even when the earliest of her works *The Bride*,

arguably the least mature stylistically, is attracting critical attention? The answer that is suggested by some literary scholars is that Sidhwa is far more confident and successful when she writes about the Parsee Community in Pakistan, than when she attempts to represent South Asian migrants, particularly Parsees in the US.¹⁶ However, I consider the oblivion of *An American Brat* to be symptomatic of the difficulties in accommodating South Asian writing in America, under traditional categories of ethnic literature and the tendency to group works produced by South Asians into a British Commonwealth/Postcolonial paradigm. While the Partition novels of Sidhwa can easily be studied under the rubric of Colonialism/Postcolonialism/ Nationalism, this historical framework is not available in the academic reception of *An American Brat*. Thus I consider *An American Brat* to be not so much a failure of Sidhwa's representation of a new milieu, America, but the failure of disciplinary categories, and conditions of reception to be responsive to new writing. Lavina Shankar has written about the contentious relationship in the affiliation of many South Asian writers and critics with Postcolonial, as opposed to Ethnic Studies. She uses Bharati Mukherjee and Gayatri Spivak in a comparative model, tracing the affiliation of Mukherjee with Asian American, and Spivak with the Postcolonial Studies. Shankar speculates whether this identification of many South Asian critics and writers with Postcolonial Studies stems from the perception of its greater academic prestige, or whether it arises from South Asians' "inability to identify with the discrimination and persecution many East and South East Asians

¹⁶ Robert L. Ross in "The Search for Community in Bapsi Sidhwa's Novels" alludes to the fact that some U.S. reviewers found the American passages to be less satisfying, and also to Bapsi Sidhwa's own comment that "it is not easy to portray the nuances of a culture one is not born to."

have historically experienced in America." (*A Part Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America*. 54).

Thus the question of South Asian literary affiliation is connected to the larger question of the liminality of South Asian identity within Asian America. As Deepika Bahri in her essay "With Kaleidoscopic Eyes," has noted:

It is not accidental that the mention of the word "Asian," conjures up in the American mind a Far Eastern Asian rather than South Asian presence. In numbers and primogeniture, the former have always played a more significant role in this country, largely because of geographical proximity between countries of the Pacific ocean and the American West. (*A Part Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America* 35).

The difficulties of South Asian literary works to be identified as Asian American is inextricably linked to the tenuous nature of South Asian American identity. The primary identification of most South Asian immigrants has been to their national homelands, rather than to a coalition of race or color within the US. Amritjit Singh in his essay "The Possibilities of a Radical Consciousness: Africa Americans and New Immigrants" has cautioned us about the impediments of these national/religious affiliations, "The diasporic South Asians have been heavily invested in projects that serve the needs of homeland nationalisms. . . . The net effect of these tendencies is to reinforce 'national' or religious identities and impede any progress toward global citizenship or alert participation in American life" (*Multi-America* 221). However, Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt in their introduction to *Postcolonial Theory and the*

United States have elaborated on the possibilities of collaboration and productive exchange between theorists of the Border Studies School of American Studies and Postcolonial theorists. Singh and Schmidt describe the distinctive approach of the Border School to the question of immigrant identities:

The Borders school puts forth a compelling counter-paradigm of its own—a paradigm that seeks to tell the history of a different (and plural) cultural space, the border or la frontera, that is neither the site of assimilation nor the marking of an alien Other. It treats such a space . . . as a realm of exile, mobility survival strategies, and the emergence of alternative and multiple identities mixing old and new that cannot be easily or accurately assimilated into earlier dominant narratives of ‘American’ identity (13).

In elaborating on the position of the Border School in US Studies, Singh and Schmidt draw connections with its approaches to many tenets of Postcolonial Theory. According to them the central thrust of the Borders School has been in establishing the need for “studying US ethnicity in a transnational context where the assimilation of immigrant ethnicities is not the primary focus”(15). It is in this enterprise of seeking an alternative to the assimilationist models of US ethnic identity that Postcolonial Studies has contributed most obviously. Thus Singh and Schmidt are attempting to reverse the exclusionary and competitive relationship between Ethnic Studies and Postcolonial Studies, by seeking ways in which the two disciplines can facilitate and enrich each other's scholarly endeavors.

Lavina Shankar and Rajini Srikanth in their essay “South Asian American Literature: Off the Turnpike of Asian America,” have offered some reasons for the disidentification and the lack of a fit between South Asians and South Asian literature produced in America with the category of Asian American Literature. According to them, for South Asian American writers, the United States is not the “central stage on which the action of their texts unfold”(371) but “only one site of relevance among a number of possible locations worldwide”(371). They argue that “the concurrent invocation of other homelands and the relative lack of concern with issues of citizenship and belonging within the US civic structure—have inhibited the easy incorporation of writing by South Asian Americans into the domain of Asian American literature”(371). This may account partially for the relative invisibility of *An American Brat* within Bapsi Sidhwa’s oeuvre. In the discussion that follows, I focus on *An American Brat* as Bapsi Sidhwa’s attempt in writing an immigration narrative, with the ostensible aim of achieving the American Dream. Although the novel charts the achievement of the dream of freedom and material prosperity for the heroine Feroza and her uncle Manek, it cannot fulfill the logic of cultural assimilation with which it begins. The novel seems to be following the generic conventions of a romantic marriage plot, but the comedic elements in the novel gradually collapse. Unlike the classic structure of a comedy, where young lovers successfully negotiate resistance to their love expressed by parental authority, in this novel, parental authority successfully thwarts Feroza’s romance with David. The novel ends with Feroza’s decision to stay on in the US, the achievement of independence, but it is tempered by a half-expressed realization of the limits of the American Dream and the

impossibility of complete assimilation within American society. I also trace the variegated nature of the history of South Asian immigration, and attempt to reveal the ideologically constructed nature of the myth of South Asian model minority, which the novel seems to privilege. In juxtaposing the history of South Asian immigration, particularly its heterogeneous class composition, against Bapsi Sidhwa's novel of South Asian immigration, I try to draw attention to the cracks and fissures in the text which gesture at the buried, complicated history of immigrant life, that the overt celebratory thrust of the narrative cannot completely erase

Contrary to the tendency to separate Sidhwa's oeuvre into the geographic spaces of South Asia and the US, and thematically into nationalism, partition, and immigration, I would like to concentrate on the common thread in both geographic categories. This is the trope I named as "selective remembering" in the first section of my discussion. In *Cracking India*, this "selective remembering" is connected to the history of censorship in the transmission of Partition memory. *Cracking India*, in attempting to render a complex rewriting of Partition in the form of the novel, attempts to reverse this trend to an extent, but cannot escape some omissions of its own. For example, there is no recording of the difficulties and the resistance to the recovery and repatriation of abducted women. Of course, no novel can represent all aspects of the Partition story. However, *Cracking India* seems to privilege Mother and Godmother's accounts of the violence and its aftermath, consigning Ayah's voice and experience to silence and near erasure. In a similar vein, in *An American Brat*, the narrative renders invisible the varied class composition of South Asian immigration into the United States. Like the silence of Ayah, in *Cracking India* and her

banishment from the borders of the new nation of Pakistan, the working class female immigrant in the South Asian diaspora is consigned to a blank space of non-existence and amnesia. This novel—both a representation of the construction of the successful “model minority,” and a female bildungsroman, in sync with widely held notions of the American dream—contains elements that point to the impossibility of this quest, for large sections of immigrant populations.

Before developing further the trope of selective remembering, which I identify as the common thread between the two novels of Bapsi Sidhwa, I will try to look at the complex history of South Asian immigration to the US, which provides the context for *An American Brat*. I want to dwell on the diversity and heterogeneity of the histories of immigration to expose the ideologically constructed nature of the myth of the model minority, a dominant mode of reading the lives of South Asians in America. Not only is the paradigm of the model minority inadequate for the analysis of the varied class composition of South Asian immigration, it is deeply problematic with reference to questions of gender within the South Asian immigrant community and the question of the relationship of this ethnic group with other racial and ethnic groups, in the fabric of multi-racial American society.

Ronald Takaki in his chapter on early South Asian immigration to the US, “The Tide of Turbans” in his book *Strangers From a Different Shore*, locates the first wave of South Asian immigrants to the United States in the advent of the Punjabi agricultural laborers from north India into California in the early years of the twentieth century. From the very beginning this group was subjected to intense hostility and competitiveness by the local white working class because of their

readiness to work for cheaper wages. They were driven out of railroad and lumber industries in which they were initially employed and pushed increasingly into agriculture.

Although sharing with Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian immigrant groups, common experiences of white racism, the Punjabi immigrants of South Asia, were seen as racially different from the preceding Asian groups, and in fact sharing the same racial origins as white Americans in their Caucasian ancestry. However, the expectations of these early South Asian immigrants that they could be naturalized as a result of this racial commonality, at a time when citizenship in the U.S. was restricted “white persons,” under a 1790 federal law, were shattered after the Supreme Court ruled in the *U.S. vs. Bhagat Singh Thind* that “Asian Indians were ineligible for citizenship” (*Strangers* 299). This ruling established that color was the most significant criterion in the fixing of racial labels. The *Thind* decision was followed quickly by the restrictions on Punjabi immigrants in owning land, which pushed many of them from farming into agricultural labor or prompted the arrangement of dummy partnerships with those Americans who were eligible to own land. The denial of land ownership coincided with the passage of anti-miscegenation laws, barring marriages between Punjabi immigrants and white women.

This history of early South Asian migration contradicts sharply with the perception circulated by the mainstream media that South Asians in North America represent the bourgeoisie of their native lands. The history of the early Punjabi immigrants shows the existence of far more radical consciousness, both in terms of their response to imperialism and in terms of challenging American racism. Ronald

Takaki points out that for the early South Asian Punjabi immigrants, the denial of the hopes of American citizenship “underscored the importance of Indian independence from British rule”(Strangers 300). This feeling of solidarity with anti-colonial resistance in India, led to Taraknath Das’ publishing of *Free Hindustan*, in 1908, followed by the formation of the Ghadhr Party, the name ghadhr meaning revolution in Urdu. Sucheta Mazumdar in her introductory essay to *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings By And About Asian Women* argues that collective political action has not been absent in South Asian American history, despite the scarce attention that has been given to it. Mazumdar offers us the example of South Asian women, offering their gold bangles to finance the 1914-1915 Gadhar (Revolution) against the British. Not only were these immigrants able to connect to anti-imperialist politics in their country of origin, they were able to identify common features of racism between their situation of being racially discriminated in America with the racist policies of colonial rule.

One of the most interesting features about the lives of the early agricultural immigrants, which is a common link between their lives and that of East Asians, is the discrepancy between the number of male immigrants compared to females. Mazumdar documents in her essay that in a 1909 Immigration Commission Survey it was found “that of the 474 male ‘Hindoo’ farmworkers found, 215 were married and all 215 wives had remained in India”(4). This gender ratio in early Asian immigration is symptomatic of the United States’ use of immigrant labor as a disposable resource for the advancement of capitalism, long before the period we have come to designate as post- Fordist, flexible capital accumulation. The skewed gender ratio indicates that

US immigration relied on the gendered division of labor, and the gendered identity of the labor force to ensure a supply of docile and unorganized manual labor, while deferring the possibility of permanent stay, or the accommodation of differing cultural identities into the composition of its working class. The denial of immigration to women was an effective way of ensuring the temporariness and disposability of this pool of labor. Keeping families divided across borders keeps alive the possibility that the immigrant workers will return after some years of work. Of course, this would be augmented by the passage of more restrictive immigration laws and national quotas, which would further reduce the possibility of permanent residence and naturalization. A large number of this first wave of Punjabi immigrants married Mexican women. This reveals that the early immigrants from South Asia were not so obsessive about remaining endogamous, in the manner of the later immigrants, for whom the control of female sexuality becomes the dominant mode of preserving ethnic identity. While Ronald Takaki details the cultural give and take of the Punjabi-Mexican marriages in the sharing of customs, languages, religions and food habits, he also points out "Asian Indian-Mexican marriages had their share of cultural differences and conflicts."(*Strangers* 310). Karen Leonard in her book *The South Asian Americans* has argued that these marriages were not "opportunistic attempts to secure land, but commitments to permanent residence in the United States; they simply reflected the men's decisions not to return to India and the families they may have had there"(52). Leonard goes on to write about the cultural negotiations and hybrid identities that these marriages produced. The marriages that survived were based on mutual respect and tolerance for the different

religions practiced by the partners. The men allowed their children to practice the Catholic faith, while the Mexican women inculcated respect in the children for the Sikh and Hindu faiths. The men and women developed a kind of functional bilingualism, though neither group attained proficiency in the other's language, Spanish or Punjabi. The Mexican women learned to cook Indian food. The children of these marriages identified themselves as Mexican Hindus, the word Hindu signifying a political connection with their Indian ancestry, rather than a religious affiliation.

The early wave of Punjabi immigrants came to an end with the passage of the National Origins Act in 1924, which stopped further immigration from South Asia. The United States began to rely on Caribbean and Mexican workers for its needs of cheap agricultural labor. From this period to 1965, South Asian immigration to the US was minimal. The year 1965 can be thought of as a watershed year in US immigration history, because this year brought to an end discrimination in the US immigration system based on national origins. Ronald Takaki in *India in the West: South Asians in America* writes that “this law opened the door to immigration from Asia, with an annual quota of 20,000 immigrants from each country” (81). Takaki's research informs us that between 1965 to 1985, “four times as many Asian immigrants came to the United States as during the whole previous century” (81). This constituted the second wave of immigrants from Asia. These South Asian immigrants were not agricultural workers like the Punjabi farmers of the earlier wave, but these South Asians who by 1985, helped to make up about 10% of all Asians living in the US, were “highly educated professionals from the major cities”(83).

The post 1965 South Asian immigrants were largely from the middle classes of their nations. These immigrants had received advanced degrees largely as a result of “the good graces of the socialistic Indian State”(Prashad 76). Vijay Prashad also points to the fact that 1965 also marks the reversal in British immigration policies. The tightening of British immigration made many South Asian skilled workers turn to the US as an alternative destination. It is true that the late sixties and the seventies saw the arrival of thousands of scientists with Ph.D.’s, engineers and doctors, largely from India. This has undoubtedly contributed to the image of South Asians in America as the intelligent, successful model minority. Even in the nineties, when the demographic composition of South Asians in the U.S. has changed a great deal, there is a lingering perception of South Asians as intrinsically smart and successful, retaining currency perhaps due to the arrival of large number of software engineers and technicians. Prashad offers us Bill Gates’ comment on a visit to India that South Indians were the second smartest people in the world. Prashad identifies in Gates’ remark the general assumption “that Asians in general, and South Asians in particular, are endowed with an ability to be technically astute hard workers”(70).

Elaine Kim provides an astute diagnosis of the phenomenon of the model minority in her landmark study *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*, where she argues that “the characterization of Asian Americans as ‘model minority’ or ‘middleman minority’ is largely an attempt to rationalize the relationship between Black and white Americans, at the expense of both the Blacks and the Asians”(177). Kim also points out that this myth gained currency through the nineteen sixties, not just because immigration policies were

selectively admitting a pool of labor, technologically and professionally skilled from Asian countries, but, because this was precisely the historical moment when “militant demands for social equality were being voiced by American racial minorities, led by American Blacks”(71). Especially, when the issue being contested became one of access to economic opportunity, it became convenient for the mainstream media to draw a facile comparison between groups that had purportedly made it on their own, and groups that were demanding intervention from the state to adjust prevailing inequalities. The fact that Asians were not vociferously demanding governmental assistance did not mean that they subscribed to any pristine ethic of individualism. In fact, in a scenario of historic hostility with the government, which constantly questioned Asian communities’ basic rights to property, or political representation, these groups often relied more on the ties of extended family and community for economic survival and advancement.

It is easy to see the constructed nature of this phenomenon of the South Asian model minority. Circulating ideas of the “genetic brilliance” of South Asians ignore cultural and historical factors, which have produced the entry of this group of South Asians into the U.S. Prashad argues that the 1965 Act, which enabled the influx of skilled and scientific labor, was a direct result of Cold War politics and competition of the US with the Soviet Union in the realm of space and other new technology. There was an existing shortage of such skilled labor in the US and the cheaper alternative was to import such labor from Asian countries, rather than investing in the costs of educating and producing an indigenous scientific labor force. Sonia Shah in her essay “Three Hot Meals and a Full Day at Work: South Asian Women’s Labor in

the United States” details using the research of B.N. Ghosh, the economic costs of India’s brain drain. “If the per capita average education cost of these emigrants is estimated at \$20,000, then skilled emigration to the US, between 1962 to 1967 represented a loss of \$61,240,000 for India” (210). Thus the model minority myth attributes intelligence and scientific achievement to ethnic genes, ignoring the investment by ordinary societies of these “model” groups, on their education.

Another factor that must be kept in mind in the unmasking of the model minority myth is that the myth is no longer tenable in terms of statistics on recent immigration. That is because in the years since 1965, the composition of South Asian immigrants has once again altered. Ronald Takaki notes this shift in *India in the West*, observing “that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the stream of immigration widened as the relatives of the earlier professional immigrants began to arrive”(India 84). These relatives were often “less prosperous and well educated” (India 84) than their professional relatives. After the naturalization of skilled South Asian immigrants, members of their families sought immigration on the basis of relative and family reunification petitions. Often, these applicants did not possess the higher professional degrees and skills, which had been the basis of their relatives’ immigration. Prashad cites the changes in US immigration law, post 1965, which tighten many of the previous provisions. With the passage of the stringent provisions for labor certification in the Immigration Act of 1990, the number of people immigrating on the basis of employment offers is “negligible” in comparison to those filing for family reunification. The South Asian immigrants of the 1990s are much more likely to be part of the working class than an elite professional minority. The import of scientific

and technological labor continues, but in the nineties this happens through the administration of such programs of the INS as the H-1 B, which targets software engineers to work as temporary workers for six years. The complicated process of labor certification often leads to the expiry of the H-1 B visa, before the attainment of permanent resident status. Foreign medical graduates are allowed to enter the US under J1 visa program administered by the State Department, which carries a two-year home residency requirement at the end of medical training.

Ananya Bhattacharjee in her essay “The Habit of Ex-Nomination: Nation, Woman, and the Indian Immigrant Bourgeoisie” has analyzed the inherent contradiction in the phrase the model minority:

On the one hand, the term “model” signifies a standard of excellence, set by the dominant power white and wealthy, and is presumably an invitation to the minority to join the majority once it realizes its model-ness. On the other hand the term minority signifies a relegation to the ranks of the not-majority. This contradiction between invitation and exclusion often escapes the leadership of the Indian bourgeoisie in its eagerness to join the mainstream of America (175).

Not only is the term model minority a contradiction in its semantic word play, it is as I have tried to demonstrate empirically false. The question then arises why is it such a strong force in the identitarian groupings in North America. Sonia Shah offers an insight when she writes, “For South Asians and other Asians the myth of the model minority is key to providing the rationale for racial and class divisions—and their manipulation—between South Asian and other communities” (217). Indeed, the

prevalence of the myth of one immigrant group as the model becomes the alibi of the state to posit the other groups as the deviant, the non-model, and read their inability to achieve the success of the model group to be the result of their personal, cultural, genetic, or other essentialized failings.

How does the prevalence of the myth of the model minority impact on the lives of the women of this group held to be the model? Ananya Bhattacharjee's critique of the model minority identity of South Asians locates itself precisely at the disjuncture between the "model" status of this group and its women. She gives the example of Sakhi, an organization against domestic violence, which she helped to create in New York City, not being allowed to march in the India Day Parade. The admission of domestic violence would contradict the community's self-presentation of itself as model group, embodying a timeless essence of Indian tradition. Bhattacharjee writes that the perception of the Indian community as "model" is maintained through the censorship of many realities:

The bourgeoisie sees the illegal (Indian) immigrant, the unpaid (Indian) worker and the ill-paid (Indian) laborer in the United States as mere aberrations from its coveted place as a model minority. It denies the existence of gays, lesbians, and battered women as inconsistent with that Indian heritage under which it has taken refuge: for the bourgeoisie to acknowledge their existence, would be an act of self-destruction" (176).

The middle class South Asian immigrants are also immensely invested in the control of the sexuality of the youth. Not only does this class want to deny the

presence of violence in the domestic lives of Indian women, it is deeply fearful of the loss of the community's cultural uniqueness by the second generation's embrace of American socio-cultural practices like dating. The quest to preserve the community's authenticity and indeed its honor becomes the quest to police the sexuality of the community's youth. Shamita Das Dasgupta and Saynthani Dasgupta, discuss this conflict in their essay "Sex, Lies and Women's Lives: An Intergenerational Dialogue."

Not only does the maintenance of the myth of the model minority require the denial of the violence that women are subjected to within the community, the myth also keeps invisible the everyday labor of women responsible for even the perception of such a model community. Sonia Shah locates the underpinnings of the success of the 1960s immigrants in the fields of science and even business, not in the brilliance of their minds, but in the subsidizing of their labor by the home work performed by their women, in the labor of household-work and child care, which does not enter into the sphere of wages, and in the family owned businesses like motels or grocery stores, which transform waged labor into an extension of unpaid domestic labor.

Although it is true that some South Asian women do indeed live the lives of successful middle class professionals, there are many South Asian women, like South Asian men and other Asian men and women, who fail to find employment commensurate with their education or work experience. Although Asian women are visible in professions of power and authority like medicine and law, a majority of them engage in clerical work. Sucheta Mazumdar points out that Asian women provide the largest pool of unorganized labor for the semiconductor manufacturing

industry in California's Silicon Valley. It is in the context of these facts that Mazumdar questions the notion of success as "individual achievement." She concludes "The paen to the individual disguises reality."

What aspect of the South Asian immigrant experience finds expression in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *An American Brat*? The plot of the novel revolves around the migration of Feroza, a Pakistani Parsee girl, from Lahore to the US. This is precipitated by the growing wave of Islamic religious fundamentalism, which seems about to infringe on the cultural autonomy of this religious minority, represented in the depiction of Feroza's family. Feroza's journey begins as a visitor, under the tutelage of her young uncle, Manek, an MIT student. The novel traces her experiences of cultural contradictions, as her stay extends as that of a student. She finds a friend in the American girl Jo, and expands her intellectual horizons by enrolling in a variety of classes. The crisis in this almost idyllic narrative of self-discovery erupts when she falls in love with a Jewish American young man, David Press. This provokes absolute resistance from her family, bringing her mother to America on the explicit mission of breaking up her relationship. After a long stay, her relentless campaign of highlighting their cultural differences succeeds. The novel closes with Feroza's relationship with David ending, but with her decision to stay on in the US on her own.

Reading *An American Brat* in conjunction with feminist and materialist analyses of South Asian immigration to the US, reveals some interesting parallels and departures. Although the architectonic of the novel seems to replicate the dominant narrative of the success of a model immigrant community, there are several fissures in the text, from which a deconstructive reading can proceed.

From the opening pages of the novel, Bapsi Sidhwa establishes a binary between the two places between which the plot of *An American Brat* oscillates, Pakistan and the United States. We are given a picture of a rapidly Islamicizing Pakistan, at a moment when General Zia ul Haq has just risen to power, and the relatively more liberal and secular atmosphere of the Bhutto years has come to an abrupt end. It is an especially vulnerable time for religious minorities in Pakistan. Feroza, the young heroine, when we first see her has been affected by the propaganda of Islamic orthodoxy, particularly in matters relating to dress. In an ironic reversal of generational roles, Feroza is embarrassed at her mother Zareen's act of wearing a saree with a sleeveless blouse, imploring her not to reveal bare skin in public. This alarms Zareen, who remembers a time of greater personal autonomy for women, and a societal acceptance of Parsees as culturally different, and hence entitled to their own dress codes. It is the restrictive atmosphere of Lahore that makes Zareen think of the US as an alternative place of growth and freedom for her daughter, an antidote to her acquiescence to Lahore's religious fundamentalism, with its particular modes of policing the female body in its physical and psychological modes of expression.

As Feroza commences her journey into maturity in America she gradually loses the consciousness of her body, which would be under the surveillance of a religious and social police in Pakistan. This radically alters her sense of herself, being almost a physical liberation from her old self. The novel maps out for us the various stages of this transformation. At the airport, when she arrives, she is aware of being gazed at uninhibitedly and unabashedly by two American young men. She is aware that such a gaze is no longer likely to be censored by community or religion. This is

followed by gradual changes in dress, the abandonment of the salwar kameez for jeans and finally the ironic reversal of donning shorts that expose bare skin. Her greater comfort with her own body also parallels her ability to find her own voice, and forge friendships with girls and boys. It culminates in her relationship with David Press, which marks a transition into a full expression of her sexuality.

It is at this point in the narrative that the clear bifurcation of the two places, Pakistan as religious and traditional orthodoxy, and the US as freedom and self-expression crumbles. In this new place, and in this new relationship with her body and her identity, Feroza finds herself harshly censored by her mother. Zareen arrives to deliberately end her romance, because the Parsee community cannot permit marriages with "nons." Although the South Asian immigrants of the 1960s are generally endogamous, this situation is intensified in the Parsee sub-group of South Asian immigrants, because the religion has no room for conversion. Marrying outside the fold means the end of one's religious and cultural life within the community. Sidhwa voices a sharp critique of the inflexibility of Parsee laws, through the consciousness of Zareen, who is torn between the happiness of her daughter and allegiance to her religion. Zareen realizes with dismay that "these educated custodians of the Zoroastrian doctrine were no less rigid and ignorant than the *fundos* in Pakistan" and that "the mindless current of fundamentalism sweeping the world like a plague had spared no religion, not even their microscopic community of 120 thousand" (306). Sidhwa is perceptive enough to identify the fundamentalist trends in religion to be a global phenomenon, not something that can be projected on to an "other" group.

Although, Sidhwa's critique of Pakistan's Islamic ascendancy is nuanced by a balanced ability to see the fundamentalism, nascent even in her own faith, she undoubtedly views Pakistan as the place for fewer opportunities for a woman's self-realization. By contrast, the US is the place that allows Feroza the space to study, make friends, and discover herself. On her visit home, Feroza is conscious of the narrowly inscribed life-choices of her contemporaries, and the vastness of her options, in contrast. The novel celebrates all the milestones of Feroza's initiation to the US, from her early forays into museums and shopping malls with Manek, her young uncle, to her success as a student of hotel management, and her mastering of the skill of driving. A critical awareness of America's shortcomings or the limits of the idea of the American dream is not absent, but Sidhwa's critique of the US is never as forceful or as subtle as her critique of Pakistan. In Feroza's experiences, the three central episodes that fracture and complicate the authorial legitimation of the American Dream are the encounter with the Immigration personnel, incidents of consumer racism and of course the final break-up with David.

When Feroza offers homage to the US with the question "Which other country opened its arms to the destitute and discarded of the world the way America did?"(239), the narrative seems to have entered into a zone of amnesia. This is because Feroza's own arrival into the US had not produced such legendary hospitality. The Immigration officers had interrogated her ruthlessly, humiliating her by searching her baggage, pulling out her negligee, and insinuating that she was in fact there to marry her uncle Manek. The racist remark of one of the immigration officers "Are you kidding? We know y'all marry your cousins," had provoked

Feroza's outburst, "To hell with you and your damn country. I'll go back" (*An American Brat* 64). This episode resonates in the reader's memory and diminishes the credibility of Feroza's later statement of the US's hospitable and generous immigration.

The racism that Feroza encounters upon her immediate arrival repeats itself in the marginal moments in the novel, when the main plot seems to be in stasis. While the novel celebrates America as a consumer's utopia, there remain some troubling episodes of consumer racism, e.g. when Feroza is ignored as a customer because of her foreignness. This uncomfortable situation is quickly rectified, when Jo asks the rude sales people to "stop pickin"(150) on Feroza. There is no questioning of this model of a white friend tutoring and chaperoning Feroza's journey into American consumer culture.

Finally, Feroza's relationship with David would seem to be a conscious attempt to break down the racial and ethnic boundaries in the realm of personal relations. It is possible to blame the failure of this relationship on the harsh opposition that Zareen and Feroza's entire family offers it. However, the reason Zareen succeeds in her campaign of dissuading the two lovers, is that she is able to portray successfully their real cultural differences. Even more painful than the overt xenophobia of Immigration officers is the lack of "transnational literacy" exposed in the sphere of interpersonal relations. In a rare transition into David's stream of consciousness, we can glimpse at the limits of fashioning interpersonal relationships, in a context of asymmetries of knowledge circulating between two different cultures:

The very thing that had attracted him to Feroza, her exoticism, now

frightened David. Zareen had made him feel that he and Feroza had been too cavalier in dismissing the dissimilarities in their backgrounds. He felt inadequate, wondering if he could cope with some of the rituals and behavior that, despite his tolerant and accepting liberality, seemed bizarre. Stuff his mouth with sweets, break a coconut on his head! And, were he by some gross mischance accepted to the Zoroastrian faith, which fortunately was not permissible, he'd have the singular honor of having his remains devoured in a ghastly Tower of Silence (*An American Brat* 309).

In addition to tracing the growth into maturity of Feroza, *An American Brat* also maps for the reader, the career of her uncle Manek. Manek represents the successful immigrant in a far less ambiguous way than Feroza. His choice of profession identifies himself very closely with the post 1965, scientist with professional degrees. In the first half of the novel, Manek is a student at MIT, extremely hard-working, resourceful and thrifty. He becomes Feroza's tutor in America, and the bulk of his lectures are initiations into the world view of capitalism. Manek tries to indoctrinate Feroza in to the classic virtues of capitalism, thrift, economy, the value of time, and self-reliance. His methods of teaching these lessons are often quite draconian. He leaves Feroza behind at a Salem museum to teach her self-reliance. Thrift includes not only admonishments against Feroza's preference for designer clothes, but also devising ingenious ways of complaining about entrées at restaurants, to avoid paying the price for the meal. All these episodes are laced with Sidhwa's deft humor, and we are aware of a re-working a picaresque genre in Feroza and Manek's early adventures.

However, for all of Manek's aggressive desire to assimilate in the US, a telling instance which is when he relinquishes his name for the more Americanized "Mike", he still goes home to Lahore and marries according to the traditional South Asian practice of arranged marriage. This is almost a temporal disjuncture in Manek's passage and embrace of capitalist modernity. Sidhwa does not read arranged marriage as a sign of feudal patriarchy and an instrument of oppression on South Asian women, as dominant discourse on South Asia often does. She provides many positive and romantic possibilities within the framework of arranged marriages in her novel *The Crow Eaters*, but the Manek/Aban relationship cannot be celebrated as one of marital bliss. If Feroza represents the exceptional South Asian woman, Aban can be thought of as the representative of the typical South Asian woman, who comes to the US, not to pursue her own individual career, but very often to accompany her husband. She is often a homemaker, not having the skills to enter the paid workforce, or lacking competence in the English language, or in recent situations, the legal permission to work.

Aban is represented in the novel as a stereotypical nagging wife. She is unable to adjust to the insularity and isolation of American suburban life, and longs for the emotional and physical ties of home and community. In a sense Aban and Manek inhabit or long to inhabit different temporalities. Aban longs for the time-space of the extended family where domestic work creates a shared feminine space of support, and a community of women. In the time-space of the modern American nuclear family, constructed on the ideology of individual romantic love, the former support structure is completely unavailable, and domestic work becomes alienated labor. In the US,

Aban's life consists of the dreary routine of caring for her child, without the help of a traditional extended family and cooking lavish meals for her husband. Manek had been attracted to her soft voice, but marriage and America transform her into a woman complaining shrilly about her new space. Although Aban and Manek's arguments are depicted with a comic touch, they gesture at the difficulties rife in many marriages among South Asians, over many of which there is a sanctioned silence. Incidence of domestic violence is very much on the rise in this community, and women with educational and professional degrees who are financially independent are not immune to its threat. The absence of an extended family space, to counsel, protect, relieve some of the financial and other pressures of everyday life can be thought of as one of the factors precipitating this escalation of violence.

The representation of the least idyllic aspects of American life is given to us not in the incidents in the lives of any of the South Asian characters, but in the representation of the lives of Jo and her brother Tom. The violence, dysfunctionality, and failure depicted in the lives of Jo and her relatives, stand I think, metonymically for the lives of the largest section of the South Asian immigrant population, the working class migrants with limited educational and professional skills, and with few opportunities to fulfill their dreams of material success. Jo is represented as a young woman encountering severe problems with regard to issues of her body image and weight. Her insecurities about her body entwine her in an abusive relationship with a young man called Mike, a drug addict who constantly steals her things and beats her up. Jo's mother is a compulsive gambler, and her brother Tom is an unemployed alcoholic. His wife ekes out a living by taking care of foster children. Sidhwa's

deepest anxieties about the American Dream are expressed in this section, but she soon reiterates her faith in America. The unreliability of the authorial voice problematizes the overt celebratory thrust of the narrative. Sidhwa's indecisiveness about the American Dream is visible in the transitions in Feroza's point of view, vacillating and shifting at almost every turn of the page. After her visit to Tom's (Jo's brother) house, she reflects on the contrast between this family's situation and those she had known in Pakistan "Children were not given up for adoption or 'farmed out' . . . Men didn't go to seed the way Tom had. . . . She wondered was this the price one paid for the non-interference and the privacy she was beginning to find increasingly attractive?" (*An American Brat* 212). This is a moment of epiphany for Feroza, but its illumination is reversed by the quickly enforced enthusiasm of Feroza's self-congratulatory reflection; "Within the heady climate of her freedom in America, she felt able to do anything" (*An American Brat* 216).

If in *Cracking India*, the labor of the working class woman was transformed into a sign of sexuality, the working class immigrant's body is physically absent in *An American Brat*. It can only be glimpsed at the margins of the text, in the representation of the novel's least glamorous and successful characters. The working class immigrant's body is physically absent in *An American Brat*. This is a significant departure from *Cracking India*, which was able to present a picture of a working class community and chronicle its opposition to elite nationalism. Although, Sidhwa is trying to present a particular variety of the South Asian immigrant, the highly educated professional, this exclusive focus deprives *An American Brat* of robust comedy of the earlier novel. Poverty can only be glimpsed at the margins of the text,

in the representation of the novel's least glamorous and successful characters. Racism too is relegated to the textual margins. In its determination to portray a narrative of the achievement of the American Dream, this novel does not embrace or accommodate other perspectives, which question this paradigm. Even though Sidhwa does not confront these issues, they remain as issues refusing to banish from the margins of the text.

Bapsi Sidhwa's oeuvre is complex precisely because it does not fit into the neat binaries of Postcolonial/ Asian American, the divide that Lavina Shankar has identified in her essay, "The Limits of (South Asian) Names and Labels: Postcolonial or Asian American?" Sidhwa represents both the Postcolonial Pakistani nation, as well as the South Asian Immigrant experience in America. *An American Brat* oscillates between these spaces. While attempting to depict pursuit of the American Dream, of material prosperity and assimilation, the text reveals the limits of this project. While ostensibly engaged in the construction of a model minority subject, elements in the novel reveal the fragility of this project.

The novel does not imagine radical alternatives, but in gesturing at the limits of bourgeois immigrant dream, it forces the reader to renegotiate and rethink the place of South Asian fiction in the American continent. The erasures and blind spots in the text resonate with the erasures in the formation of South Asian American identity in America. Perhaps a thoughtful engagement with these textual blind spots in this and other South Asian literary works, can signal the remapping of South Asian history and identity in the US, beginning the progress towards the desired ideal of "global citizenship."

Chapter 4

Women in Nationalism and Diaspora: Rape, Motherhood, and the Female Intellectual and in Buchi Emecheta's Novels.

In the previous chapters I attempted to explore the intimate and conflicted relationship of gender and nationalism, particularly in the narratives of the Indian Partition. I examined in my analyses of Salman Rushdie and Bapsi Sidhwa the deployment of gender for the construction of a nationalist movement, the conflation of territory with the body of a woman in the nationalist imaginary, the creation of a new ideal of womanhood for nationalism, and the erosion of the urgency of the women's question in the transition to a decolonized modern nation state. In this chapter, I make a geographic transition to another continent, Africa in order to explore questions about postcolonial communities and intellectuals in a comparative context. The specific thread, which runs through my analyses of the literary intellectuals, so far has been the question of gender, and how it plays out in the discourses of nationalism and migration. While the issue of gender is the buried subtext in Salman Rushdie's novels, it is explicitly foregrounded in Bapsi Sidhwa's novels. In Buchi Emecheta's fictional oeuvre too, issues of gender take center-stage. Emecheta's novels like Sidhwa's posit the female body as the site of inscription of national possession.

Emecheta's novels foreground the female body as the victim of rape in the contest to establish ethnic ascendancy. In addition, she also explores the female body as the site of reproduction, and the manner in which the maternal body gets harnessed

to discourses of national and migrant communities. As a literary intellectual, sharing cultural affinities with the country of her birth, Nigeria, and her adopted homeland, Britain, Emecheta's fiction highlights the contradictions of simultaneously inhabiting post-industrial society in Britain and the traditional Ibo society in Nigeria, which is in the process of being continuously transformed by its encounters with capitalist modernity. The contradictions and conflicts engendered by this dual cultural dwelling are dramatized in the representation of the female body. Like the female body on which is scripted the sexual violence of territorial and ethnic domination, the female maternal body, in national and the diasporic formations, destabilizes assumptions about oppressions on women being specific to any location. In other words, just as women's bodies become targets of specific forms of sexual violence within national and diasporic patriarchies, the maternal aspects of their bodies and lives are also subject to various forms of control imposed by nationalist and diasporic societies. I am not suggesting a homogeneity of spaces based on gendered oppressions but I do want to destabilize the prevalent binary of nation and diaspora by an examination of this division through the lens of gender. The narrative of sexual violence on women's bodies may play out in the moment of communal carnage during Partition, as depicted in Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, it can also erupt in a diasporic context, as evident in the plot of *The Satanic Verses*. In a similar vein, the ideology of motherhood and its concomitant policing of female sexuality and fertility plays itself out in postcolonial nations as well in migrant communities within metropolitan centers.

In exploring these issues, of rape, fertility, and motherhood, Emecheta's novels depict a range of women, traversing the spectrum from the female intellectual to the illiterate woman grappling with the demands of traditional tribal life. The female intellectual is often one who has access to a global cosmopolitan education. However, these categories of the female intellectual and the ordinary female subject are not entities separated by geographic location, or class privilege. In fact, in her autobiographical novels *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen*, Emecheta depicts the transformation of an impoverished Ibo girl into a migrant intellectual. The boundaries of the intellectual and the female subaltern are far more fluid in Emecheta's oeuvre than in the novelists studied so far. The experiences of sexual violation too are not restricted to the underprivileged women in the novels. The most striking example of this is the character of Debbie Ogdemgbe, in *Destination Biafra*, who at the beginning of the novel is a privileged transnational intellectual, but as she travels through a Nigeria ravaged by a bloody civil war, undergoes a series of violations, which reduce her status to that of a war refugee. The gap of privilege separating her from her female companions in the journey is rapidly bridged. After the immediate emergency of the war, however, Debbie reverts to her privileged status of a transnational anti-war intellectual/activist. Although the experience of the brutality of the war that she has personally faced has transformed her fundamentally, the novel cannot imagine solidarities between intellectuals and communities as anything but sporadic and contingent.

In a similar vein the transformation of an Ibo girl into an immigrant in Britain and a writer of fiction, is not an uncomplicated narrative of easy class mobility. If

Adah in the autobiographical novels *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen* feels a sense of solidarity and identifies with other poor white women on welfare, she retains a sense of class prejudice against the uneducated or undereducated Nigerian immigrants in Britain. Thus, deeply entrenched racial and class prejudices, which erupt across fissures in the text, caution against a utopian reading of these novels as expressing an easy affiliation between the female intellectual and female subaltern. Buchi Emecheta's novels recognize and acknowledge the complications introduced by class in the fashioning of a solidarity based only on gender.

I will first examine *Destination Biafra*, a novel that depicts a civil war unleashing sexual violence on women. The act of rape creates a temporary bonding between the heroine, Debbie, and other rural women who are her companions in the journey across Nigeria. This suffering is a rite of passage for Debbie, shaping her as an anti-war intellectual/activist. *Destination Biafra* prompts an immediate comparison with *Cracking India*, and I will examine the similarities and departures in the two representations of rape and the clues they convey about the ideological underpinnings of female sexuality in two polities going through a process of decolonization.

In the second part of my discussion, I turn to Emecheta's representations of motherhood, both in traditional Ibo society in the novel *The Joys of Motherhood* and in its counterpart in the experience of a young Ibo mother in 1960s London, depicted in the novels *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen*. Tied to the representation of motherhood is Emecheta's representation of poverty in these novels. The subject of poverty is a common theme in the representation of motherhood in Ibo tribal life, as well as in the experience of the Ibo immigrant in Britain, trying to raise her children

on her own after the end of an abusive marriage. I consider these novelistic representations of poverty to be Emecheta's critical response to dominant metropolitan discourses on poverty. These novels are a postcolonial female intellectual's sustained critique of the vilification of the woman of color and her fertility and the racialization of poverty in metropolitan centers. Emecheta's critique of the dominant discourse on poverty and women's fertility, oscillates between two poles, Nigeria and England. Her novels continuously expose the ideological underpinnings of the prevailing discourses on motherhood and poverty. She is equally vocal in her critique of traditional Ibo patriarchy as well as the new patriarchy of the modern welfare state in Britain, in which the female Nigerian protagonist of her novels has to make her new home. She ruthlessly interrogates the unequivocal celebration of motherhood in traditional Ibo society, exposing it as an ideological mechanism of policing female sexuality. She opposes the traditional assumption that the *raison d'être* of a woman's life in traditional tribal society is that of motherhood. Instead, she reveals motherhood to be a terrain of work, which is gradually being stripped of its traditional value and privilege, as Ibo society transitions into a modern market economy, where goods and services have fixed cash values. Motherhood, being outside the sphere of market relations, involves an enormous investment of labor without any material gains.

In a parallel instance, Emecheta explores the status of motherhood in post-war Britain, in the experience of a Nigerian immigrant who becomes a single mother, dependent on welfare. In the London novels, she subjects institutions of social welfare, public housing, childcare, to a hard scrutiny, revealing the imperatives to

control the sexuality of poor women beneath the façade of benevolence. She also exposes the covert and sometimes overt blaming of urban poverty on poor women and their fertility by these very institutions of the modern welfare state. This resonates at the macrocosmic level with discourses on global population which replicate a first world/ third world hierarchy and scapegoat third world women and their fertility for the poverty of their societies. This trend ignores the empirical research that gives credence to the theory that population rates have stabilized in proportion to the rate of industrialization and access of women to higher education and health care. Global initiatives on population control deliberately ignore the matrix of social, economic, and cultural factors, which have an impact on the choices of third world women with regard to their reproductive lives and issue unrealistic population goals without engaging in a holistic approach to world population. There is no examination of the disproportionate consumption of the globe's natural resources by the industrialized populations, who are far fewer in number. Such a refusal to look at issues fairly, without merely apportioning blame to the poorer populations of the world, can only exacerbate the world population problem and accentuate the divide between the policy makers and those whose problems they are attempting to resolve—poor women of the global south. This gap once again parallels the gap between poor women of color in 1960's London and the social workers and government officials ostensibly engaged in resolving their crises.

In exploring the connections between the conditions of poverty and ideology of motherhood, both in Ibo society and post-war London, Emecheta also tries to re-imagine possibilities and modes by which women empower themselves and resist and

critique the ideologies of the tribe or the state that they are implicated in. She charts the coming into consciousness of a female protagonist as a writer. However, as I mentioned earlier, this passage of a female subaltern into a female intellectual is also fraught with contradictions, introduced by the interweaving of class and racial identities. Adah, the heroine of the London novels, resists and overcomes the structures of poverty, racism, and the patriarchy of the welfare state to find her vocation as a writer. She understands the structural dimensions of her poverty and empathizes with the community of poor women around her. However, these novels can only imagine a solution to these endemic problems through the route of individual exceptionalism. They cannot envision a sense of a collective struggle. However, the strength of these novels lies in their ability to expose the complex nuances of racial, ethnic, and class identities, which prevent the forging of a collective struggle.

Representing Rape:

Destination Biafra, is a novelistic representation of the Nigerian Civil War. This novel foregrounds the experience of women in war and focuses on the act of rape as a tragic inevitability of ethnic strife. I dwell on the question of whether Emecheta's representation of rape follows traditional European and African representations of rape and to what extent her representation of rape is a feminist one. I also examine the manner in which Emecheta harnesses a gendered representation of the Civil War to voice her critique of nationalism. Finally, how do the moment and

experience of gendered violence influence the growth of a female transnational intellectual and her relationship with the community of subaltern women.

The civil war in Nigeria, which erupted and lasted from 1967 to 1970, had a traumatic impact on the literary imagination of the newly decolonized country. A variety of Nigerian intellectuals, historians, poets, and novelists have been grappling with the memories of the conflict and attempting to archive its fragments, memories, documents, as well as attempting to understand the complex interplay of national, tribal, and global factors that produced the tragedy. Among literary practitioners, Buchi Emecheta shares her interest in the Biafran War, with many other distinguished Nigerian writers, including the Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, Elechi Amadi, Cyprian Ekwensi, to name a few. Emecheta's writing about the war is distinctive because it foregrounds the question of women in the Nigerian civil war more explicitly than the male writers.

Even more significantly, *Destination Biafra* represents the Nigerian Civil War from the point of view of a cosmopolitan female intellectual, Debbie Ogedemgbe, who is the heroine of the novel. Although Emecheta has been criticized for not having direct experience of the war, because of her migration to Britain in 1962, it is precisely because of her metropolitan location at the time of the conflict that she is able to represent the international dimensions of the problem.

Emecheta's depiction of the Nigerian Civil War, erupting from the political wrangling for power between the three most populous tribes in Nigeria, the Hausas, the Yorubas, and the Ibos, coheres around the representation of acts of violence on women. Although the novel depicts widespread acts of savagery, triggered by the

political conflict, including especially the political assassinations and coup d'états, which initiate the civil war, the most poignant emotive core of the novel remains the brutal rape of the heroine, Debbie and the violence perpetrated on her and her fellow travelers, during their journey to Biafra.

Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan in her essay "Life After Rape: Narrative, Rape and Feminism," in her book *Real and Imagined Women*, uses a comparative method of literary analysis to explore the question of the interconnections between rape, narrative structure, and feminist politics. She approaches two canonical English novels, *Clarissa* and *A Passage to India*, and examines their representations of the rape of the female protagonist in comparison with a third world text, a Tamil short story called "Prison" by the popular magazine writer Anuradha Ramanan. Sunder Rajan also draws upon representations of rape by African American female writers like Maya Angelou and Alice Walker, as well as the cinematic treatment of rape in Jonathan Caplan's film *The Accused*. In the canonical texts, Sunder Rajan observes "all that is really left for the raped woman to do is to fade away. Adela, doing the 'decent thing' retracts and returns to England; Clarissa, transcending her body's humiliation falls ill and dies" (72).

In contrast, feminist texts of rape Sunder Rajan argues, "must engage in textual strategies to counter narrative determinism. Such negotiations are achieved by and result in alternative structures of narrative"(73). One means by which feminist authors achieve the goal of avoiding narrative determinism in a rape narrative is to alter the placement of rape in the plot structure. The rape incident is located at the beginning of the narrative in Angelou, Walker, and Ramanan's texts. In the canonical

texts of rape, *Clarissa* and *A Passage To India*, the rape incident is located at the center of the novels, and “the novels cannot altogether avoid on the one hand a certain tension not unlike sexual titillation, and on the other a certain relaxation of tension, resembling post-coital boredom, around that point” (Sunder Rajan 74). Moreover, Sunder Rajan points out that in these canonical novels, the actual incident of rape is present only as an absence. In both *Clarissa* and *A Passage to India* the incidents of rape are left unrepresented. In *A Passage to India*, the omniscient narrator relinquishes his authority and does not tell us what really happened. These evasions and absences are symptomatic, according to Sunder Rajan, of a deep underlying male fear of accepting the unsupported accusation of a woman who has been sexually violated. Sunder Rajan catalogues the strategies used by feminist texts of rape to counter narrative determinism:

by representing the raped woman as one who becomes a subject through rape rather than merely one subjected to its violation; by structuring a post-rape narrative that traces her strategies of survival instead of a rape-centered narrative that privileges chastity and leads to 'trials to establish it . . . by literalizing instead of mystifying the representation of rape, and finally by counting the costs of rape for its victims in terms more complex than the extinction of female selfhood in death or silence (77).

Does *Destination Biafra* fit the rubric of a feminist representation of rape? This question impinges on the larger question of Buchi Emecheta's relationship with feminism itself. It also intersects with the question of what exactly we mean by

feminism. I shall explore the debate surrounding Emecheta's relationship to feminism, her own statements on the subject and the manner in which African, African American, and Euro American critics have interpreted her, in the next section and in the conclusion of this chapter. At this point in the discussion, I would like to argue that Emecheta's relationship with feminism is a selective one. As a creative writer, rather than a theorist, her fiction combines elements of her natal African culture as well as the cultural influences of Britain, her adopted homeland. Interrogating both of these received structures of belief and knowledge, Emecheta's fiction evolves into a kind of feminism, which is deeply conscious of the blind spots of first world or western feminism. Although aware of the difference in her situated knowledge about women's experiences, as opposed to academic feminists she does not try to consciously posit an alternative framework like womanism or third world feminism, in opposition to hegemonic western/ white/ middle class feminism. As her London novels demonstrate, she constantly seeks to imagine transnational and interracial women's imaginative and political coalitions. And yet, she is not embracing of aspects of western feminism, in fact she distances herself from it time and again, in her autobiographical statements and interviews.

Given Emecheta's tentative and partial alliance with the movement and ideology of mainstream feminism, Emecheta's novel of rape cannot fit into the classic narrative paradigm of a feminist text of rape postulated by Sunder Rajan. In between Sunder Rajan's binaristic division of the canonical/ male text of rape and the classic feminist text of rape, there must exist a variety of narratives, which blur and complicate these schematic boundaries.

Tuzyline Jita Allan has studied the evolution of rape narratives in Buchi Emecheta's fiction in her essay "Trajectories of Rape in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta." Allan sets up a contrast between male and female narratives of rape within the body of African fiction. She argues that "Africa's quintessential rape narrative tells the story of economic and cultural ravishment of the continent by foreign prowlers and native sons. The feminization (and idealization) of Africa finds its finest expression in the trope of rape which carries the potent threat of displacing "real women in rape discourse" (Allan 208). Allan argues that this image of "Mother Africa as rape victim" (209), erases the violent reality of rape with respect to its female victims. The African female writer faces the enormous challenge of representing the gendered oppression that rape embodies, while at the same time preserving their commitment to expose the political exploitation of the African continent. Instead of privileging either woman or nation, African women writers attempt "to locate the postcolonial project at the intersection of gender and nation in order to adjudicate the rival claims of these competing categories"(Allan 209-210). Allan examines the issue of marital rape in Emecheta's novels like *Second Class Citizen* and *The Joys of Motherhood* and points out the contradictions, silences, and the authorial diffidence in naming marital rape as rape. *Destination Biafra* marks an interesting shift in Emecheta's fictional oeuvre because in it she attempts to put "women into African rape discourse next to the symbolically ravished body of Africa" (215). Allan ultimately sees this attempt as unsuccessful because Emecheta's representation of rape "challenges but fails to unsettle the standard practice of rape representation in the African literary establishment, forcing a compromise that

undercuts the centrality of women's rape experience in the novel" (Allan 215). Allan's argument is that in creating her dream woman and ideal heroine in Debbie Ogdemgbe, Emecheta is unable to explore the full impact of the trauma of rape that she is subjected to. Not only is there an absence of the emotional response recorded in the novel, the imperative that the ideal heroine Debbie has to survive and fulfill her destiny as an ambassador of peace puts pressure on the narrative not to mourn or linger over the traumatic act of rape. In a sense, the female experience of rape gets sidelined or cast into the periphery of the text, as the novel rushes to fulfill its commitment to Nigerian nationalism facing a devastating crisis.

Before attempting to use Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan's and Tuzyline Allan's theorization of rape and narrative to read closely the incident of rape in *Destination Biafra*, I would like to briefly look back at some connections between this African text of rape, in comparison with, *Cracking India*, the South Asian novel of rape and nationalism that I examined, in the previous chapter. At one level, the trope of rape in *Destination Biafra* replicates the structural pattern of the Indian Partition narratives. In both cases, the limits of nationality and ethnic territories are inscribed on the bodies of women. Veena Das, in *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*, has analyzed the place of the female body in the Indian Partition, "The woman's body . . . became a sign through which men communicated with each other . . . Thus the political programme of creating two nations of India and Pakistan was inscribed upon the bodies of women"(56). This observation may be applied transculturally to the case of the Biafran conflict as well. Ibo women of the breakaway nation of Biafra are raped by the Nigerian army, made

up of Hausa and Yoruba soldiers. Although Emecheta's narrative of ethnic warfare and rape follows the broad canvass strokes of those of the Indian Partition, there are interesting complications and departures in her presentation as well.

The most significant departure in Emecheta's presentation of rape in a novel depicting civil war and ethnic rivalry is that there isn't as much of an investment in the notion of tribal honor being located in the bodies of women. A corollary to the notion of honor being housed in the bodies of women is that death is preferable to the dishonor of sexual violation. Veena Das reminds us "In family narratives of Partition riots . . . the heroic sacrifices made by women have a special place. By choosing violent death for themselves rather than submitting to sexual violence by men of other communities, women are enshrined in these narratives as saviors of family honor" (*Critical Events* 63). Das is careful to point out that such a notion of women preferring violent death to sexual violation emanated from male versions of these traumatic episodes. Women's narratives showed a much "greater ambivalence about the burden of heroic death" (*Critical Events* 63). However, even in narratives of the Indian Partition written by women there is an overwhelming framing of the raped woman as one who had been stripped of her honor. Ayah in *Cracking India* rapidly descends to prostitution after her abduction and rape, and other victims of sexual violence in the novel living in a rehabilitation camp, are referred to as "fallen women." In the end, Ayah is sent off to India to join her family, and she in a sense disappears from the narrative. In Emecheta's rendition of a similar narrative of female sexual violation, the emphasis lies in the will to survival by the very victims of violation. J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada has commented in the essay "Buchi Emecheta:

Politics, War and Feminism in *Destination Biafra*.” that “Emecheta’s greatest achievement in the work is her insistence that although more men might have died from the actual fight, women were largely its practical casualties” (394). The main thrust in the novel is to depict “how women battled to save themselves and their families in a time of national emergency”(Nwachukwu-Agbada 394). This primary impulse in *Destination Biafra* to depict a crisis in nationalism, as it is registered in the lives of women, makes it a proto feminist, anti-war novel. However, the text contains overlapping strains of nationalism, class, race, and ethnic tensions, which intersect and sometimes contradict or disrupt the feminist project inherent in the novel.

In the introduction to her autobiography *Head Above Water*, Emecheta describes Debbie Ogdemgbe, the heroine of *Destination Biafra*, as her dream woman. A number of critics like Katherine Frank have found Debbie's characterization to fall short of her creator’s assessment of her. Indeed at the beginning of the novel, Debbie is shown to be a privileged daughter of a Nigerian political family, possessing the coveted credentials of an Oxford education and suffused with the ideas of New African womanhood, challenging the traditional expectations of feminine subservience. When she first appears in the novel, we see her in a rendezvous with her English lover Alan Grey. Debbie joins him, at a hotel right after she returns from Oxford. Alan's reflections on her provide an interesting early insight: “She was too English for his liking. If he was going to go native he might as well do it properly. The way he saw it people like her were building themselves big identity problems”

(*Destination Biafra* 36). This is a very revealing comment about the manner in which racial differences permeate intimate personal relationships. Clearly Alan harbors a particular western, white male fantasy about African female sexuality. That expectation of some kind of essentialist African authenticity or femininity is defied by the reality of Debbie's bicultural education and her determination not to conform to gender roles and expectations. Even at this early juncture of her relationship, she categorically rejects the idea of marriage to Alan.

Debbie's rejection of marriage as a vocation for herself stems from her complicated relationship with her parents, Samuel and Stella Ogdemgbe. Early in the novel, when she attends the wedding of Abosi (who will later become the military leader of Biafra) and Juliana, Emecheta describes her as "playing the dutiful daughter of Samuel Ogdemgbe" (*Destination* 43). However, when Emecheta leads the reader to her inner ruminations, we learn of her determined resistance to her parents' life choices:

She would never agree to a marriage like theirs in which the two partners were never equal. Her father always called the tune. . . .She wanted to do something more than child breeding and rearing and being a good passive wife to a man whose ego she must boost all her days, while making sure to submerge every impulse that made her a full human (*Destination Biafra* 44).

At the end of this passage of introspection, Debbie decides to join the Nigerian army as an officer. This is clearly a vocation, which is the very antithesis of her parents' aspiration for her to be the wife of a member of the ruling Nigerian elite. At this

junction, however, Debbie's choice of her vocation is not well thought out. She quickly decides on a career in the army in order to escape the patriarchal expectations of subservient wifedom. However, she does not question the meaning of entering a vocation which is completely subservient to the demands of nationalism and which operates on a legitimation of violence against those who present any kind of threat to the idea of the nation state. Debbie cannot see the interconnectedness of the private and the public, between the patriarchal family and the modern nation state, and the all-pervasiveness of the workings of power. Attempting to break free from the clutches of patriarchal power by rejecting the traditional role of society wife, she is naïve enough to imagine that just assuming the traditionally male vocation of an army officer will confer her all the privileges of gender equality. Moreover, she does not interrogate the role of the army in the modern nation-state, and what it means to be the handmaiden of an institution, which sanctions the use of force to protect the idea of the nation state. Although she has a fledgling understanding of Nigeria's colonial history and its incomplete and fragmentary decolonization, which preserves the economic interests of the colonial power through the policies of accentuating ethnic and tribal rivalries, she has not yet developed a critical understanding of the interconnected relationship of patriarchy and nationalism.

At another level, although Debbie is disenchanted with the widespread corruption in political circles, she is not fully aware of her unique class privilege. Debbie is aware that her father has acquired his wealth by exploiting the ban on local liquor, by importing foreign liquor and siphoning off ten per cent of its profit. Emecheta depicts Debbie's outrage at her parents' dubious moral standards. However,

Debbie does not yet see how she is implicated in this complex web of power and privilege. As the Biafran war breaks out, and she is entrusted with a diplomatic mission which forces her to travel across the dangerous war-torn terrain, she begins a journey of self-discovery, which is simultaneously a process by which she unlearns the privilege of her upbringing and education.

One of the earliest operations that Debbie is involved in as an officer of the Nigerian army is depicted in Chapter 7. Debbie commands an operation in which Ibo officers are singled out and subsequently imprisoned. They are denied food and toilet facilities, and forced to consume human excreta. They die an agonizing death over five days, while their Ibo brothers outside the prison face the first bloodbath and barbarity of the civil war. In a conversation with her lover Alan Grey, after the incident, Debbie expresses her remorse at her own complicity in the barbaric trajectory of events. "No one told me that they were going to be killed. . . .Now . . . they are all dead, and I was the one who arrested them"(*Destination Biafra* 87). For the first time, Debbie realizes that she is just a cog in the wheel of the war machine, and she has very little control over the ethical implications of the chain of actions that she is commanded to perform. Her naïve idealism in the cause of service to the nation receives its first jolt as she is exposed to the systematized brutality that the civil war engenders. Moreover, she cannot identify with any one faction in the war, because she does not belong to any of the major warring tribes. She is neither Ibo nor Yoruba nor Hausa, but Itsekeri a numerically small tribe whose language is a combination of elements of Ibo and Yoruba.

After the political assassinations and coups, the Nigerian civil war emerges as a clear contest for ascendancy between two characters, the military leaders Saka Momoh and Chijioke Abosi. After the hopes raised by peace talks in Aburi crumble, Debbie is entrusted with the mission of speaking to Abosi in person and convincing him to give up the idea of secession. The reason Saka Momoh chooses Debbie for this mission is manifold. Abosi has had a long association with Debbie's family. Debbie and Abosi have been friends at Oxford. But, even more significantly, Saka Momoh advises her to "use her feminine charms to break that icy reserve of his" (*Destination Biafra* 118). Realization dawns on Debbie that she has been chosen by the men in power "to use her sexuality to make Abosi change his stand" (*Destination Biafra* 121). It is only Debbie's female friend and fellow officer Barbara (Babs) who forewarns Debbie about the terrible personal risk that she is exposing herself to by accepting the mission.

When Debbie is ready to set off on her diplomatic mission, she asks her mother to start packing, after the brief visit at her friend Barbara Tetuku's home. Emecheta draws attention to Debbie's manner at that significant moment: "Mama we have to start packing,' Debbie began, then gave a short, nervous laugh: 'But I think we shall need a man with us. We can go in Father's old Rover, that won't attract too much attention. I'll ask our driver Ignatius to get ready'" (*Destination Biafra* 114). This open admission about the need for a man undercuts Debbie's posturing as the brave new woman of Africa, so far. After they start on their journey, Debbie admonishes Ignatius for not driving on the main road. Ignatius explains that he is trying to avoid the road checks, because he is afraid that he will be harassed because

of his Ibo identity. Debbie confidently assures him, "Whoever checks this car will see I am an officer, Ignatius. I am not going East on a pleasure trip" (*Destination Biafra* 121). The irony of Debbie's naïve assurance in the protection offered by her uniform is not lost on the reader in the subsequent chain of events. On the way to Benin from Ibadan, Debbie's car is stopped by a man with a pregnant wife and child. This man informs them that the Biafran soldiers have captured Benin. Ignatius, the Ibo chauffeur is overjoyed, and the two men break out in chants of "Hail Biafra." Suddenly two army cars close in on them and order them to surrender. Debbie tries to assert that she is a Nigerian and not a Biafran soldier. But the soldiers have already made up their minds that the inmates of the car are Biafran, perhaps by hearing the initial slogans. Debbie still holds on to her gun, aiming it at the leader of the group. The soldiers grab the pregnant woman and threaten to hurt her if Debbie does not surrender the gun. Debbie agrees to hand over the gun under intense pressure from the pregnant woman, her husband, and Ignatius. She extracts a promise that the soldiers will allow them to leave if she surrenders her weapon. Once she does that, however, she loses what little leverage she had in the situation. As soon she is disarmed, her mother is beaten and Ignatius is brutally shot. Debbie is dragged into the bush along with the pregnant woman and raped. She hears her mother continue to protest, "Leave that woman alone! She is pregnant—Don't you people fear God?" (127).

Emecheta conveys the brutality of the rape incident in a remarkable economy of prose:

She could make out the figure of the leader referred to as Bale on top of her, and then she knew it was somebody else, then another person. . . . She felt herself bleeding though her head was still clear. Pain shot all over her body like arrows. She felt her legs being pulled this way and that, and at times she could hear her mother's protesting cries. But eventually, amid all the degradation that was being inflicted on her, Debbie lost consciousness (*Destination Biafra* 127).

When she regains consciousness, it is morning. Debbie learns from her mother that the pregnant woman has been tortured, the barrel of a gun has been pushed into her, she has been cut up, her unborn child's head decapitated, and finally left to die. Her elder child has also been kicked to death. Ignatius and the husband of the pregnant man have been killed and the soldiers have taken away their bodies. In spite of all the devastation and brutality, Stella Ogdemgbe pleads with her daughter, urging her not to give in to despair. The chapter ends with Debbie's acceptance of her mother's dictum: "But Debbie was alive, and that was everything" (*Destination* 130).

The actual scene of rape in *Destination Biafra* is presented with unambiguous if brief detail. Unlike the classic texts of rape like *A Passage to India* and *Clarissa*, studied by Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, the brutality of the physical act is rendered visible to the reader. Like the classic male narrative the rape occurs at about the center of the novel, in *Destination Biafra* and there is a kind of petering of narrative tempo after the intensified violence of this chapter. However, Emecheta's emphasis on the survival of her heroine, and the concentration of the rest of the text in tracing her growth in subjectivity elevates this text to a proto-feminist one. Tuzyline Allan

has argued that this novel does not dwell sufficiently on the physical and emotional costs of rape on the female subjectivity, in its quest to make the heroine fulfill her nationalist mission. However, the fact and memory of this incident structures Debbie's subsequent response to nationalism. This incident is the catalyst for her growing critical response to nationalism. The rape is not brushed aside in the narrative. Its threat recurs at subsequent points in Debbie's perilous journey. The memories surface at several junctures in the text. The emotional and political dimensions of the rape experience have a deep impact on Debbie's evolution as an anti-war activist and a historian of the war. So, I believe that the indirect, subliminal effects of the rape incident permeate and deeply influence the rest of the novel. There is no naïve championing of nationalism after this incident. Contrary to Tuzyline Allan's reading that Debbie survives the trauma of rape because of the narrative's imperative that she fulfill her nationalist vocation, I think that from this point onwards, there is a much more vocal criticism of nationalism, enabled by Debbie's sharper consciousness of her gendered identity.

My reading of *Destination Biafra* has been structured on the basis of an implicit comparison with Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India*, which I examined closely in the previous chapter. These two novels while depicting two distinct societies are similar in their representations of polities in a state of crisis and rupture, in the immediate aftermath of decolonization. While the Indian Partition was the legacy of colonial administrators, the Nigerian Civil War, though not untouched by the machinations of the departed colonialists, can be interpreted to be the result of the internal contradictions of the creation of nation state of Nigeria with the yoking

together several disparate and culturally distinct tribal groups. Most significantly, in the representation of the histories of violent ethnic conflict, both novels register these traumatic incidents as rapes perpetrated on the bodies of women by men of competing ethnic or religious groups. While in *Cracking India* women of the working class were shown to be most susceptible to ethnic violence and rape, in *Destination Biafra*, upper class privilege is revealed to be very unreliable as a protection against violations of the female body, under conditions of ethnic war. In both novels, violation of the bodies of women become a symbolic enactment of an attack on the territory or the land of the other ethnic or religious group. However the translation of this violation of a woman's body to the symbolic loss of the honor of a community is more prevalent in the South Asian cultural context.

In a comparative analysis of *Destination Biafra* with *Cracking India*, the former emerges as less invested in the idea of honor and its loss being located in women's bodies and their violations. This is not to minimize the lingering cultural and social effects of the incident of rape in Debbie's life and her relationships with men. After the immediate trauma of rape there are no immediate signs of physical violation. However, Debbie's body and psyche continue to bear the scars of this violence and the knowledge of her violation structures the manner in which she is perceived sexually from this time onwards. Her tainted status as a raped woman is connected to racial and class hierarchies and their intersection with sexuality. Two incidents are especially significant here, Debbie's encounter with Lawal Salihu, by whom she is captured when she tries to reach Biafra by bus and her final parting from Alan Grey.

After her first rape, Debbie continues her journey to Biafra in a lorry, along with many other Ibo families trying to reach Biafra. During this lap of her travels, she decides to abandon her army uniform. This abandonment is significant because it represents a growing disillusionment with the war and ethnic nationalism and a growing recognition of and coming to terms with her gendered identity. The lorry is stopped by Salihu Lawal, and the inmates are once again subjected to brutality and humiliation.

When Debbie's bus is captured by Lawal's troops during what is termed "Operation Mosquito," the narrative seems to be poised for a repetition of the original traumatic act of rape. However, Debbie is able to prevent further violation by revealing to Lawal that she has been raped by common soldiers of the Nigerian army. This makes her instantly repugnant to Lawal, who had initially fancied her because of her reputation as the lover of a white man. This is a very revealing moment in the text, exposing as it does the chromatic and racial hierarchy in the economy of sexual desire. It is true that Debbie is able to thwart the rape attempt by playing the cultural stereotype of the tainted woman, thereby revealing her complicity with the prevailing patriarchal and racial order. However, this incident is symbolic of Debbie's greater agency and ability to protect herself better than before. It is a reversal from her abject powerlessness of the previous rape episode. Her method in achieving this may be politically incorrect. However, she does not necessarily subscribe to the idea of the tainted woman or internalize a sense of inferiority. After playing the part of the tainted woman to repel Lawal's advances, Debbie directs a set of scathing questions which declare her critical awareness of the imbrication of the racial in the domain of

sexual politics. She demands, "But would she think better of me if I was raped by white soldiers? Suppose you had been the first to touch me, what would some other person's mother think? You poor, poor men have so many problems to solve, problems you created for yourselves" (*Destination Biafra* 168). Like the part of the dutiful daughter that she played in the pre-war days, Debbie plays the part of the tainted woman at a strategic moment to regain her agency in a potentially dangerous situation and to survive its impact. She does not endorse this ideology, she is only using it for the pragmatic reason of survival.

In her final encounter with Alan, Debbie tells him of her physical violation. Once again, she notices his recoil, which is similar to what Lawal's reaction had been. She is struck by the similarity in response of two men from such different cultural backgrounds. She demands to know of Alan if his reaction would have been the same had she been raped by English soldiers. Clearly rape in the African sexual economy is tied up very intimately with race and miscegenation. There is a tolerance of the idea of this sexual violence if the perpetrator is a white man and the victim a black woman. Once again, that particular sexual trope is seen as normative because it does not disrupt the political economy of colonization but merely sanctions and corroborates it. Once again, the black woman is subsumed in the symbolic imaginary as the body of Africa and the white man penetrating her is the white colonizer. The reversal of this trope a black man raping a white woman, has been read as the apotheosis of social and moral disorder. Jenny Sharpe has studied the hysteria surrounding rape of the *memsahib* in the Indian war of Independence in 1857. Hence, the universal opprobrium and revulsion at the idea of a black man raping Debbie can

be interpreted as stemming from the same fear of the white woman being raped by a black man. Debbie, by virtue of her relationship with Alan is an honorary *memsahib*. In the racial economy of the novel, she is seen as upper class and thus almost but not quite white.

The parting of Debbie and Alan seems logical in the context of Debbie's first-hand experience of the war after the first traumatic gang rape and realization and fulfillment of her vocation as an anti-war activist and a historian of the war. This is facilitated by the recognition of her sisterhood and solidarity with other women victims of the war. Although, Debbie escapes from Lawal's advances, most of the Ibo men in the lorry are killed on his orders. Women have to witness the barbaric sight of jeeps running over the bodies of their husbands. From this point onwards, Debbie joins a group of Ibo women and their children, survivors of Lawal's massacre, attempting to escape to Biafra. Women continue to emphasize the importance of surviving, healing, and living. One of the women passengers in the lorry, counsels Debbie, "My daughter, you have to stop mourning for the dead now. We here are still alive" (*Destination Biafra* 178). This seems to echo Stella Ogdemgbe's admonitions to her daughter after the brutal gang rape.

As Debbie travels with the other Ibo women, she offers to help in carrying some of the tired and ailing infants. As she clumsily ties one of the children to her back, she reflects on the everyday realities and struggles of African women from which she has been so distanced and reflects on her role as an African woman and an intellectual:

But as she walked down that dry road in that heat, with the weight of the child almost breaking her back, it struck her that African women of her age carried babies like this all day and still farmed and cooked; all she had to do now was walk, yet she was in such pain. What kind of an African woman was she, indeed?" (*Destiantion Biafra*181).

The women in the group help one of the pregnant women to deliver a baby. When the mother dies, soon after, another nursing mother volunteers to feed him as they continue on their journey. The women name this war orphan Biafra. Later, it is Debbie who ties this infant on to her back while escaping from the shelling by wading through the swamps. Debbie is aware that the infant is struggling for his life as they walk through the swamps. Later, when she realizes that he is dead, and she releases the lifeless, shrunken body from her own; the women are united in their common grief. One of the women reads the death of the child Biafra to be symbolic of the impending death of the political existence of the breakaway nation of Biafra.

As the women in Debbie's group make their way escaping from the firing between the rival armies, facing a desolate landscape of disease and famine, they voice a very trenchant critique of nationalism, from the perspective of their gendered identity. Dorothy one of the women in the group protests against the excesses of nationalism:

Our men! A few years ago it was "Independence, freedom for you, freedom for me." We were always in the background. Now that freedom has turned into freedom to kill each other; and our men have left us to bury them and bring their children; and maybe by the time

these ones grow up there will be another reason for them to start killing one another" (*Destination Biafra* 204).

It is the interaction with these women that shapes and alters Debbie's understanding of the war, and the part she must play in it. Debbie realizes the futility of her original diplomatic assignment not only because too many events have happened in between but also because of the gender issues structuring the design of her assignment and the manner in which her message is finally received by Abosi. Abosi acknowledges that the dynamics of the peace mission would have been different had she been a man. Instead of feeling dejected at the failure of her mission, Debbie quickly fashions an alternate vocation for herself. At first, she returns to England to try and raise public awareness about the atrocities being perpetrated in Biafra. Once again she is forced to abandon this project, as she becomes increasingly disillusioned with Abosi's uncompromising power hunger and his readiness to manipulate her humanitarian efforts, not hesitating to smuggle in arms through Red Cross planes.

The novel ends, however, with a further shift in Debbie's re-fashioning of herself. She vows to mother the orphans of the war and also to record women's experience of the war. This is a clear breakthrough in Debbie's career as a transnational intellectual. This shift could never have occurred without the influence of the community of women with whom she established solidarity during her journey to meet Abosi. Pauline Ada Uwakeh has written, "Thus Debbie affirms the traditional role of African women as nurturers, oral artists and preservers of history. Significantly, Debbie's role debunks the myth of obligatory marriage as a prescription for female fulfillment" (396).

In concluding my discussion about *Destination Biafra*, as a work which attempts to reverse, to an extent, classic male representations of rape, it is useful to consider Omar Sougou's argument that Debbie "is considered a subject in process, whose subjectivity develops as the narrative unfolds" (126). Thus, unlike classic texts of rape, *Destination Biafra* concentrates on Debbie's journey East after the rape. It is here that "the narrative shifts its class focus by concentrating on the plight of the masses and privileging a war chronicle from a woman's standpoint"(Sougou 127). Thus, in its emphasis on the development of Debbie's subjectivity and in the realization of her vocation as an activist historian and a humanitarian, the novel moves beyond the narrative determinism of rape. It is through the traumatic personal experience of the war that Debbie is able to realize her solidarity with her country's women and envision an alternative to ethnic nationalism, particularly oppressive towards women, without necessarily reverting to her former existence of a privileged cosmopolitan intellectual, somewhat distanced from the ground realities of her postcolonial society. *Destination Biafra* challenges and disrupts many assumptions about the location of women's bodies in nationalist discourses, especially the passive identification of women's bodies with territory and seeks to confer agency in female subjects to critique and subvert the notion of nationalism itself and imagine alternative configurations of community. However, the moment of solidarity shared by Debbie and her fellow travelers is by its very definition a fleeting one. It cannot be sustained in Debbie's subsequent career, when she returns to London and becomes an activist against the war. Emecheta seems to be celebrating the moment of solidarity

between the intellectual and the subaltern and also simultaneously alerting us to the sporadic, contingent, and ephemeral nature of this solidarity.

Interrogating Motherhood

Destination Biafra ends, as has been suggested by critics, with the transformation of Debbie into a historian of the war, as well as adoptive mother of war orphans. There seems to be a subtle endorsement of the communal nature of African motherhood throughout the novel. However, Emecheta's other novels like *The Joys of Motherhood* and *In the Ditch* subject the institution of motherhood in traditional African society, as well as within immigrant African community in Britain to a hard scrutiny, exposing the ideologically constructed nature of this institution. Adrienne Rich in her groundbreaking work *Of Woman Born* has made a passionate argument about motherhood as a "patriarchal institution," which has been ideologically constructed as a universal human condition. Rich explores the contradictions between her own individual experience of motherhood and the institution of motherhood with its own history and ideology and concludes;

My individual, seemingly private pains as a mother, the individual seemingly private pains of the mothers around me and before me, whatever our class or color, the regulation of women's reproductive power by men in every totalitarian system and every socialist revolution, the legal and technical control by men of contraception, fertility, abortion, gynecology and extrauterine reproductive

experiments—all are essential to the patriarchal system, as is the negative or suspect status of women who are not mothers" (34).

Rich's 1976 analysis of the history and evolution of the institution of motherhood to its contemporary form resonates with many of the concerns explored by Emecheta in her novelistic depictions of motherhood. While Rich's formulations emerge from a primarily Anglo-American perspective, her work is nuanced enough, and cognizant enough of the varied nature of mothering experiences based on geographic and cultural locations. In the statement I have quoted, Adrienne Rich alludes to the patriarchal division of women into mothers and non-mothers. This simultaneous celebration of women who are mothers, and stigmatization of women who are not mothers is a theme which structures the plot of Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. Thus Rich's formulations about the institution of motherhood can be applied to experiences and representations of motherhood outside the geographic terrain of the first world. In fact, Rich is deeply critical of population policies arbitrarily imposed on the so called overpopulated regions of the world without any acknowledgement of the disproportionate consumption of the globe's resources by the numerically small populations of the industrialized west. Emecheta's novel *The Joys of Motherhood* is in the tradition of African women's writings, which question the centrality of motherhood in the lives of African women. Emecheta is in a sense following her literary predecessors like Flora Nwapa in exploring this issue in *The Joys of Motherhood*

Carole Boyce Davies in her essay "Motherhood in the Works of Male and Female Igbo Writers: Achebe, Emecheta, Nwapa and Nzeku," has noted a distinct

difference in male and female representations of motherhood. While male novelists like Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* are critical of the code of hyper masculinity, and endorse the feminine principle of nurture and creativity, they often fall into the pattern of an idealized representation of mother figures, which are very often allegorical representations of Mother Africa. Davies cautions us about the inherent dangers of this trend, "This romanticizing of motherhood is furthered by its symbolic equation of mother with earth and Africa. While this is in some cases flattering and desirable, it masks the reality of motherhood" (244). In the male literary imagination, motherhood once again becomes subsumed into the trope of land and nationalism. This is very evident in the Negritude poets whose poems "luxuriated in metaphors of motherhood and land and Africa"(Davies 244). On the other hand, women novelists like Emecheta seek to demystify the idealized images of motherhood and reveal it to be an institution for the social and sexual control of women within African tribal society. *The Joys of Motherhood* is an ironic title because as the plot unravels, Emecheta explodes the myth of motherhood being a guarantee of fulfillment and happiness in a traditional African woman's life.

Emecheta also explores the institution of motherhood in another very different social and geographic location. This is in the depiction of the experiences of Adah Obi, a young Nigerian immigrant in London in the 1960s, and her experiences as a single mother raising five children on welfare, which forms the subject matter of *Second Class Citizen* and *In the Ditch*. In these novels Emecheta works towards exploding another set of myths connected with motherhood. This is the set of myths surrounding the connections between black motherhood and poverty. She demolishes

the myth of the black mother as welfare queen exploiting the institutions of a modern welfare state, demonstrating instead, the welfare state and its agencies to be another form of patriarchy seeking to control the sexuality and fertility of working class and black women, as well as managing and regulating institutionalized poverty.

Barbara Christian in *Black Feminist Criticism* has devoted a chapter to the comparative study of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Alice Walker's *Meredian*, exploring the question of the social construction of motherhood in the context of African as well as African American societies. Christian argues, "The primacy of motherhood for women is the one value that societies whatever their differences share"(212). Christian goes on to demonstrate through anthropological research the primacy of motherhood in African societies from pre-colonial periods, which forms the context for Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* . She also traces the history of African American motherhood from the days of slavery to the contemporary moment and identifies a duality in response to African American motherhood. Unlike an unambiguous celebration of motherhood in African societies, there is a complexity introduced by the racism emanating from dominant white society. Christian points to a dual response to African American motherhood in her analysis:

On the one hand white society honors motherhood as a pure and sanctified state, and like African religions buttresses this idea with religion and myth. On the other hand it punishes individual mothers for being mothers. By relegating all care and responsibility of the child to individual mothers, rather than to the society, it restricts women at

every level of the society. And in relation to Afro-American mothers, the society neither cherishes nor respects her offspring; in fact white society clearly does not value black children (221).

Christian further argues that the dominant expectation of white patriarchy that women be confined to the home and fulfill their vocations as homemakers and mothers within its boundaries, places a tremendous burden on African American motherhood. The African American mother has in the past and also in the present had to work outside the home for the purpose of economic survival. African American women subjected by society to fulfill these impossible demands, find themselves stereotyped further, when in attempting to be mothers and breadwinners they are represented as black matriarchs, superwomen, who emasculate black manhood. Drawing on the research of social theorists, Christian points to the two dominant images of black women, the romanticized representation of black mothers as self-sufficient, strong, and all-sacrificing, or the contradictory representation of black women as castrating females, blamed for the disintegration of the black family. In her study of the two novels *Meredian* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, taking into careful consideration the differences in the socio-historical and geographic contexts within which the novels are produced, Barbara Christian is able to point to certain similarities in the two novelists' responses to motherhood. In spite of the vast differences in their plot structures, according to Christian "both writers also agree that motherhood is not an issue of the individual: it is an ideology that is interwoven into every aspect of society's basic structures"(244). Thus although separated by time period and geography, the two novels studied by Christian are unified in their protest against the

use of motherhood by patriarchal societies as a means to an end, the reproduction and survival of the species, which is profoundly detrimental to individual lives of the mothers in question.

In a similar vein, although the two novels *The Joys of Motherhood* and *In the Ditch* are located in different territories the common strain of the representation of the realities of motherhood as an institution unifies them thematically. Irrespective of whether the milieu for the representation of motherhood is the tribal Ibo community in Nigeria or it is the Nigerian immigrant community in Britain, Emecheta is committed to debunking mythologies surrounding the institution of motherhood. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta is deeply critical of the reduction of a traditional African woman's humanity to her biological function of procreation. Structured as a novel chronicling the tribulations of infertility faced by the heroine Nnu Ego to her eventual transformation as the mother of several children, the novel disrupts the inherent expectation that children are an automatic source of security and happiness in a tribal society. Towards the end of her life, Nnu Ego realizes how she has internalized patriarchal prescriptions for an ideal woman's life, the producer of male heirs, without investing her energies in developing her own skills in trading or forming alliances with other women.

Barbara Christian in *Black Feminist Criticism* has drawn upon anthropological research to suggest that although pre-colonial African societies were patriarchal, they also contained some institutions and social practices which allowed women a degree of autonomy. With the advent of colonialism, these traditional freedoms afforded to African women were gradually eroded, while western patriarchal ideologies became

more entrenched with the encounter of African societies with the regime of capitalist modernity. This transformation of African society, under the regime of capitalism, and its impact on the lives of women forms an important theme in *The Joys of Motherhood*.

Turning now to *The Joys of Motherhood*, I consider the novel to be a work in which Emecheta voices her critique of the institution of motherhood within the context of traditional African society. However, Emecheta's critique of this institution intertwines with her critique of colonialism, which exists as an overarching structure of oppression within the historical context of pre-independence Nigeria, where the action of the novel is located. For Emecheta, oppressions based on gender are not disconnected from the oppressions based on race and class, which permeate from the dominant political and economic system. In her London novels too, she strives to show the connections between the gendered oppressions of single motherhood, with post-war social and economic realities in Britain. In commenting on the double yoke of patriarchy and colonialism in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Omar Sougou has written, "This rhetoric expresses the double-sided struggle of the African women against oppressive patriarchal ideology which constructs her as the lesser Other confined to a reproductive role, and the colonial political and economic formation that subjugates the whole of the community" (94).

Emecheta does not conceal the patriarchal order structuring Ibo society in her depiction of the generation of the heroine Nnu Ego's parents, Agbadi and Ona. In the early sections of *The Joys of Motherhood*, Agbadi is depicted as a hyper-masculine chief, a brave hunter and a revered chief and also the husband and lover of many

women, often won in victorious raids on other tribes. Although ostensibly depicting a valiant hero Emecheta's tone is already critical of Agbadi's cavalier attitude towards women and his treatment of them as sexual objects or his possessions to be dispensed at his will. When Agbadi falls in love with the beautiful and arrogant Ona, he encounters a woman who does not readily submit to his will. She refuses to marry him, but becomes pregnant by him. However, Ona is hardly her own mistress. She is bound to her father, Obi Umunna, who has determined that she will never marry, but if she is to bear any son, the child will belong to her father and thus fulfill his lack of male heirs. Thus from this early relationship, we witness the manner in which a woman's reproductive potentiality is under the control of her male relatives. She has very little autonomy in the situation. The only individual decision regarding her reproductive potentiality that Ona is able to make is to decide that if she has a daughter, it will belong to Agbadi, her lover, and not her father. When her daughter Nnu Ego is born, Ona refuses to live with Agbadi, and only relents when it is revealed that Nnu Ego can worship her "chi" or personal god, from her father's home. However, the limited challenge that Ona offers to Agbadi's unfettered male authority remains inadequately explored with her premature death during the birth of her son, who does not survive either. Omar Sougou reads the representation of Ona as symbolic of the independent spirit of traditional African women. However, Ona, "demonstrates both an independent spirit and a sense of loyalty to males in her life—attitudes consonant with phallogocentric normative values"(Sougou 97). Sougou also contends that the language in which Ona is presented, "bewitching, teasing,

rude, egocentric” also commodifies her as an object of male desire, and points to the pervasive hold of patriarchal ideology, in traditional African society.

Ona's dying wish for her daughter Nnu Ego, expressed to Agbadi, is that she be allowed to have a life of her own and to be a woman. However, it is obvious from Nnu Ego's early life that she does not have the relative freedoms that her mother enjoyed. Nnu Ego grows into a dutiful daughter, humbly lighting her father's pipe and acquiescing to his choice of a husband for her. At the time of the marriage negotiations Amtokwu's (Nnu Ego's husband) family express their appreciation for her chastity by sending her father six full kegs of palm wine. Agbadi expresses his joy by uttering words of conventional folk wisdom “When a woman is virtuous, it is easy for her to conceive”(31).

These words turn out to be ironic in hindsight. Nnu Ego is happy with her first husband, but finds herself unable to become pregnant. Her disappointment reaches a crisis when she finds out that her chi, the slave woman, is withholding children from her, because she was dedicated to a river goddess, before Agbadi took her away in slavery. Incidentally, this slave woman was sacrificed at the time of the funeral of Agbadi's first wife, in spite of her protests to be allowed to live. The traditional assumption seems to be that Nnu Ego is being punished for sins committed by her father, his original crime of making love to his mistress Ona, which precipitates the first wife's death and then the burial of the slave girl, along with the dead first wife, in spite of her pleas for life.

Whether or not, Nnu Ego is paying for the violation of the moral and spiritual order of the tribe by her father, she certainly is punished for failing to fulfill her

patriarchally sanctioned task of procreation. Infertility begins the cycle of ordeals in Nnu Ego's life. Emecheta's representation of the experience of infertility is reminiscent of a similar engagement with the theme in her literary foremother, the Nigerian writer, Flora Nwapa's novel *Efuru*. Nnu Ego experiences not only a sense of failure and disappointment at her inability to fulfill her destiny, she also has to bear the humiliation of seeing herself relegated to another hut, as her husband remarries another woman, who quickly becomes pregnant. Later, when the child is born, Nnu Ego participates in taking care of him; she secretly nurses him at her breast, till she is discovered doing so and is sent back to her father's home in disgrace after a brutal beating.

She resumes living at the home of her father, who makes many sacrifices to appease the spirit of the dead slave woman, as well as adopts his remaining slaves as his children. Agbadi returns the bride price received from Nnu Ego's first marriage, and after she has recovered emotionally, he arranges a second marriage for his daughter.

Nnu Ego's second marriage brings her to the colonial city of Lagos. This begins her encounter with colonial modernity, industrialism, and urban poverty. Her second husband Nnaife works as a washer man at the house of a British couple, the Meers. Nnu Ego feels a sense of acute disappointment at her new situation. She finds her second husband physically revolting, from the moment she first sees him. She has already been given to Nnaife in marriage by this point, with the receiving of the bride price by her father. Moreover, Nnu Ego finds her husband's job of washing the dirty laundry of his white master and mistress to be extremely demeaning. She also

experiences the loss of her female companions, the warmth and intimacy of her tribal community, which have been replaced by the isolation and anonymity of the colonial city. Nnu Ego loses the traditional female network of support, which had been a positive and nurturing aspect of rural life.

In spite of her physical repulsion at her husband, Nnu Ego finds herself pregnant with his child. Her long struggle with infertility seems to have ended with the birth of a son. However, soon after his birth the child dies suddenly, leaving Nnu Ego emotionally distraught and suicidal. She is saved from jumping into the lagoon and ending her life by a kinsman from her village. Once again, Nnu Ego feels that her life is completely devoid of value because she has been robbed of her socially sanctified role of motherhood. Nnu Ego is counseled by her friends Nwakusor and Ato to resume a normal life and not give in to despair. Nnu Ego finds herself pregnant again, and she is able to deliver a healthy boy.

However, the birth of a son who does not succumb to infant mortality marks a transition in Nnu Ego's life. Once she has achieved her long desired goal of motherhood, she finds herself subject to another set of problems. These problems are a direct consequence of happenings in the larger political sphere, the beginning of the Second World War, which marks the departure of the Meers to England, with the subsequent loss of Nnaife's occupation as a domestic servant. Nnu Ego finds herself pregnant in the midst of this financial crisis. Nnaife accepts a shipping job and leaves Nnu Ego to fend for her child herself. The war creates economic shortages with the escalation of prices of basic commodities and housing. Nnu Ego's first-born child Oshia develops an illness due to malnutrition.

Even when Nnaife returns from his voyage, the reunion is only a brief interlude of happiness in a general trajectory of misfortune for Nnu Ego. Another calamity that befalls Nnu Ego is the death of Nnaife's elder brother. This event means that based on the laws of Ibo tribal life, Nnaife inherits the widows of his brother. Nnu Ego has to adjust to a polygamous living situation. There is an extensive debate about the place of polygamy in African society and whether or not it is an institution detrimental to women. In the context of this novel, Emecheta seems to be suggesting that no matter what the traditional benefits the system might have had, in a society in transition through a process of urbanization the institution of polygamy becomes an intensified agent of patriarchal oppression. When Nnaife's new wife, Adaku joins Nnu Ego's household, the two women become embroiled in a ruthless struggle for survival in cramped living quarters and limited economic resources available to the husband, working for the colonial regime, and limited access to trading available to the wives. Nnu Ego forms a brief alliance with her co-wife Adaku to demand more money from Nnaife for their household expenses. However, their relationship is one of constant bickering and rivalry for Nnaife's attentions as well as his earnings. Nnu Ego gradually comes to the realization that "men cleverly used a woman's sense of responsibility to actually enslave her" (*Joys* 137).

Just as Nnu Ego realizes that the ideological machinery of motherhood and wifehood in a polygamous system imprisons her, we witness the colonial regime's brutal act of capturing Nigerian men and drafting them as soldiers of the British army for the Second World War. Emecheta is passionate in her exposure of the barbaric manner in which Nnaife is drafted, and the powerlessness of Nnu Ego and others to

prevent his abduction. The forceful drafting of Nigerian men into the British army is a theme that surfaces in many of Emecheta's novels, and she interprets this act to be yet another kind of slavery.

The departure of Nnaife to the war escalates the already existing conditions of poverty within which she has to raise her children. After a temporary stay in Ibuza, when her father dies, Nnu Ego returns to Lagos to find that she has lost whatever trading advantage she had accrued. She is forced to begin selling firewood, which is a very physically daunting task. During the entire time that Nnaife is fighting in the war, Nnu Ego has to subsist on her meager earnings by selling firewood and on the few remittances, which comprise Nnaife's salary as a soldier. Even after Nnaife's return she is not able to break out of her cycle of poverty. A large part of Nnaife's earnings as a soldier is squandered in paying the bride price for yet another very young wife

Even the hope that her sons will supplement the family income is belied when on achieving a high school education Oshia, Nnu Ego's eldest son, leaves for the US, denying all parental expectations that he support his younger siblings. At the end of her life, Nnu Ego returns to Ibuza, completely friendless and totally deprived of any association with her sons. She is blamed for the ungratefulness of her sons and for the defiance of her daughter in marrying a Yoruba man. As she takes stock of her life, Nnu Ego comes to realize that in the changed socio-economic environment, motherhood has not brought her the promised security and emotional sustenance in her old age. She reflects:

She had been brought up to believe that children made a woman. . . Still, how was she to know that by the time her children grew up, the values of her country, her people and her tribe would have changed so drastically, to the extent where a woman with many children could face a lonely old age and maybe a miserable death all alone, just like a barren woman? (*Joys* 219).

Thus the profound structural changes that colonialism ushers intensify the oppressions on African women. Nnu Ego loses her traditional habitat in Iboya and is forced to eke out a living in overcrowded Lagos. She loses the traditional advantages to child rearing afforded by the extended family network in tribal society. Nnu Ego has to pay disproportionate costs of child rearing, through her paid labor in the firewood trade and in the unpaid labor of caring for her children. However, because she is raising children in a transitional time from rural to urban society, her children do not subscribe to the ideology of obeisance to the community that has structured all her life's choices. Instead, they assert their own individuality and do not sacrifice their personal ambitions for filial duties. Nnu Ego's tragedy arises from being caught between two competing worldviews emanating from two different social systems and her inability to question these received ideologies. Cynthia Ward has categorized the two competing worldviews in *The Joys of Motherhood* as representative of two distinct cultures, the tribal culture of Nnu Ego's early life being shaped by orality and the transition to Lagos signifying her entry into the culture of literacy. Nnu Ego remains incompetent in the new culture of literacy, which her children rapidly master, precipitating the cultural and emotional divide between her children and herself.

Within the context of *The Joys of Motherhood*, the female character who most stridently opposes the prevailing ideologies of patriarchy is Nnu Ego's co-wife Adaku. It is Adaku who asserts her own agency when she decides to come to Lagos, and claim her rights as Nnaife's inherited wife, rather than languish in rural Ibuza. Once in the city, she embarks on a prosperous career in trading. Like Nnu Ego she faces disappointments in her life as a mother. She only has two children who survive, and the loss of her son by Nnaife is a great sorrow to her. Being unable to produce sons has a direct impact on Adaku's social status. She always has to be subservient to Nnu Ego, who is privileged because she is the mother of Nnaife's sons. Even when Nnu Ego violates ordinary social codes of good behavior and is rude to Adaku's kinswoman, Nnu Ego is not chastised by the male elders, since Adaku is the junior wife and only the mother of daughters. Omar Sougou points out that it is through her interaction with Adaku that Nnu Ego achieves her moments of the greatest introspection. Nnu Ego questions the unfairness of a system in which her violation of social codes of good behavior is condoned, merely because she has male children who have survived. Adaku instigates Nnu Ego to stage a kind of a domestic strike, demanding more money from Nnaife for household expenses. In the end, Adaku decides to reject the complex hierarchies of a polygamous household that privileges male heirs. She leaves Nnaife's household and sets up her own independent home with her daughters. She invests her energies in expanding her trade, and educating her daughters. She is determined that her daughters will not be forced into premature marriages by their father. However, when she stakes a claim for independence, she also declares, "I am going to be a prostitute." (*Joys* 168). Omar Sougou has

interpreted the characterization of Adaku as the double of Nnu Ego, who fulfills the feminist potentiality never realized in Nnu Ego. However, it is ironic that in the pervasive patriarchal ideology that the novel depicts, even feminist rebellion has to be worded in the language of patriarchal, binaristic stereotypes. Adaku can only express her non-conformism with the ideology of good motherhood and wifehood by declaring that she will be a prostitute. She cannot say that she will be a businesswoman or a trader. Female identities and roles available to her are extremely circumscribed by language, even when what Adaku is envisioning for herself and her daughters is radically different from institutional prostitution. She is in fact contemplating a sexual life for herself, which is independent of the sources for her livelihood. She seeks fulfillment in her trading enterprise, as well as sexual fulfillment, which will not involve subservience to elaborate hierarchies. She is not thinking of earning a livelihood through the trading of sexual favors. However, the only vocabulary she has to map out her vision of being single, independent, and sexually fulfilled is the metaphor of the prostitute.

Thus in *The Joys of Motherhood* Buchi Emecheta voices a forceful and subtle critique of traditional Ibo patriarchy, especially in its operations on the ideology and institution of motherhood. While the main project seems to be to demystify the idealization of motherhood and reveal it to be an instrument of social control, it overlaps with the larger critique of colonialism and its contribution to harshening the lives of African women.

The London Novels

So far, I have explored how the female body is represented in texts as the site for the working of various nationalist ideologies, focusing on the body of the raped woman and the body of the mother and the manner in which these are subsumed into narratives of nationhood. I have also tried to show the manner in which Emecheta's novels embody these representations, not to reinforce their ideological assumptions but to open them up to questioning and critique. Through her representation of rape in *Destination Biafra* and motherhood in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta successfully interrogates the validity of ethnic nationalism in the former, and questions the absolute value of motherhood imposed by patriarchies on women's lives. She deconstructs the mythology of happiness and fulfillment circulating around the image of motherhood. In her London novels, Emecheta continues her engagement with the subject of motherhood, focusing once again on the body of the mother, and the investment in it in the creation of a community's identity.

Buchi Emecheta's representation of motherhood is intimately linked to its relationship with poverty. Irrespective of the geographic location of the institution of motherhood, Emecheta's protagonists are mothers, who are constantly seen to be struggling against the entrenched conditions of poverty. Her fiction thus dismantles the notion of poverty and wealth being separated by geography, that is the perception of third world poverty and metropolitan wealth, but heightens instead the connection between motherhood and poverty. In the London novels, Emecheta's fiction can be seen to be a response to the prevailing discourse of poverty in the industrialized west, which narrowly constructs first-world poverty to be a primarily urban, inner city

phenomenon. Frances Fox Piven in studying the genealogy of poverty and welfare has traced the genesis of poverty in the US , from the last century, culminating in the experience of the Great Depression, with the consequent institutionalization of welfare as a mode of regulating and managing poverty. The regulation of poverty through the institution of welfare is closely connected to the gendering of poverty. This discourse of poverty pushes into visibility and localizes in its representation the poor person as a single mother on welfare. Sociological research lends support to the theory of feminization of poverty. Women and children are disproportionately over-represented among the poor. Single women with children face the greatest burden of poverty, contributing to the phenomenon of pauperization of motherhood. Instead of a thoughtful analysis of the reasons for this, mainstream representations of poverty have only amplified the hysteria surrounding the welfare mom.

Vivyan Adair in her work, *From Good Ma to Welfare Queen: A Genealogy of the Poor Woman in American Literature, Photography and Culture*, has argued that the bodies of poor women and their children become produced and fixed by ideology as sites of “extreme pathology and danger,” juxtaposed against “the order and logic of the privileged”(Adair xi). Adair argues that in circulating images of motherhood, there is a sharp polarization between normative, middle class, white motherhood, and non-normative poor and single motherhood, which is often non-white. This ideological production of the bodies of poor women, along with the discourse criminalizing the sexuality of women of color masks various other forms of state spending which are seen as legitimate. The ideological construction of women on welfare as violating some kind of sanctified work ethic and getting a free ride erases

the unpaid work of women in raising children, which leaves them with less time to enter the paid work force. Moreover, it completely neglects the fact that women's work of raising children is a direct contribution to the economy, as children enter the workforce and subsidize through their labor the social costs of caring for the retiring generation. While Adair's comments are based on poor women's representation in the US, her observations are certainly applicable in the representation of poor women in a racially divided Britain of the 1960s.

The social world of 1960s Britain, which forms the backdrop of Emecheta's London novels, provides an interesting interplay of factors surrounding issues of population, wealth, and poverty. Kathleen Paul's research in *Whitewashing Britain* shows that there was a tremendous shortage of labor in post-war Britain of the 1950s, and a concerted effort to encourage the growth of national population. Along with the imperative to foster the birth rate, immigration was supposed to be a reliable policy to maintain flourishing levels of population to ensure Britain's imperial might. Through this period, there was a concerted campaign to recruit East Europeans, and the Irish as Britons but a simultaneous reluctance to accept West Indians, Africans, and South Asians because of overt or hidden racial prejudice. The ideological construction of Britain as a tiny island being swamped by hordes of colored immigrants camouflaged the emigration of Britons to Australia and Canada, which throughout this period exceeded the numbers of immigrants. The hysteria surrounding the overcrowding of Britain by immigrants finally led to the passage of anti-immigration legislation in the 1970s and 1980s.

This background is very significant in Emecheta's novels *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen*. At one level, the novels depict the tribulations of the heroine Adah, and her successful struggle against an oppressive marriage, a remnant of the Ibo patriarchy from which she seems to have escaped through her migration to Britain. However, the novel is almost a documentary representation of the conditions faced by Nigerian immigrants in Britain in the 1960s. Although Emecheta's fiction primarily critiques the institution of traditional African marriage, even when it is transplanted into a metropolitan location, she points to the complex matrix of social factors which precipitates the personal crisis. The representation of Francis, a Nigerian immigrant, who is unable to successfully integrate into the British workforce, unable to find suitable housing, and who feels an abject sense of personal failure, is a direct consequence of the racial hostility which he faces in London. Although the narrative written from an autobiographical perspective tends to vilify Francis and celebrate Adah's success, it cannot erase the pervasiveness of racial prejudice that both of them must struggle against.

Along with the overarching prevalence of racism, Adah is also subjected to the oppressions of class, when she joins the welfare rolls and gets a public housing apartment. In the depiction of various institutions of poverty and its regulation, Emecheta exposes the inhumanity of this system, which permits only subsistence, denies women the chance of any betterment, and subjects them to unrelenting surveillance.

In the London novels of Emecheta, *Second Class Citizen* and *In the Ditch*, although there has been a shift to a metropolitan center, and exposure to capitalist

modernity, Adah, the protagonist of both the novels, is still subject to patriarchal expectations of normative motherhood. She has no power to make any decisions about her fertility, and in her sexual life too she is reduced to an instrument for the fulfillment of her husband's sexual demands. When Adah finally assumes control over her life and strikes out on her own, she finds herself in the clutches of yet another form of patriarchal control, this time the agencies of the welfare state which police her actions as a single mother on welfare. Although Emecheta depicts the institution of welfare in 1960s Britain, her novel has tremendous resonance for the urban underclass in the United States in recent years, the era of massive transformation in the welfare system under a neoliberal political and economic order.

Just as in *The Joys of Motherhood* there was a heightened textual investment in the fertility of women's bodies, whether that of Ona or her daughter Nnu Ego, the London novels of Emecheta also focus a great deal of attention on the maternal body of its heroine Adah Obi. In Nigeria, Adah's body is valued by her husband and his family because of its fertility, and because she is able to produce male heirs who will ensure their immortality. Her body fulfills the function expected of it in traditional African patriarchy.

When she rejoins her husband Francis in London, the same fecund body is presented as an object for the sexual gratification of her husband. The intimacy between Francis and Adah is described as an assault. Adah is extremely fearful of becoming pregnant in the new domestic circumstances of an acute shortage of housing that she finds herself in on arriving in London. This unease and anxiety over resuming sexual relations with her husband is quickly branded as "frigidity," by him.

Later Adah has to shoulder the burdens of earning a livelihood for her family, coping with the demands of child care and supporting her husband's education, all the while facing the discomforts of another pregnancy. In addition she has to cope with the daily exigencies of health crises faced by her children as a result of poor living conditions and malnutrition, without any support from her husband as well as the painful knowledge of her husband's many infidelities. Her husband's neglect and selfishness heightens with the passage of time. Adah feels that she is totally unappreciated and unloved.

Adah's marital ordeals continue with her difficulties in securing contraception¹⁷ for herself without the consent of her husband. When her secret act is discovered by him, she is accused of promiscuity, because Francis believes sex without reproduction for women would enable them to be unrestricted in their choice of partners. Clearly for Francis, reproduction is a mode of controlling and limiting the sexuality of African women. Francis involves his landlord in this confrontation with Adah, shaming her further.

The domestic abuse, and lack of material and emotional support for the family gradually erode Adah's desire to remain married to Francis. The final blow to the already floundering marriage is dealt when Francis destroys the manuscript of the first novel Adah writes in longhand. Francis refuses to acknowledge the reality of

¹⁷ Emecheta's representation of Adah's struggle to achieve some control of her reproductive potentiality differs from the experiences of many poor women of color who have been suspicious and resentful of racist structures which have tried to restrict the fertility of poor women of color. See Chandra Mohanty's "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism". Hazel F. Carby alludes to a related phenomenon of pharmaceutical dumping s when she writes, in "White Woman Listen: Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood": Both in the US and in Britain black women still have a 'role' as in the use of Depo Provera on them—in medical experimentation. Outside the metropolises, black women are at the mercy of the multinational drug

divorce, citing its non-existence in Ibo law. At the court hearing he refuses to acknowledge his children as his own in order to avoid paying child support. Adah takes up a job as a library officer at the British Museum and assumes full responsibility for her children as a single parent.

The experiences of Adah as a single mother in London forms the subject matter of *In the Ditch*, which was published in 1972, two years earlier than *Second Class Citizen*. In this novel we encounter Adah once again struggling with the crisis in housing conditions, fueled by racist attitudes towards immigrants of color in Britain. At the beginning of the novel, Adah's Yoruba landlord tries to scare her into leaving the abysmal apartment she rents by enacting a juju ritual. Adah refuses to be frightened by a ritual that would have scared her in Nigeria. She applies for a public housing flat and is successful in obtaining one.

At the Pussy Cat Mansions, Adah encounters hostility by some "establishment" families who are not comfortable with her racial difference. Besides the overt hostility of the Smalls, Adah also encounters the benign condescension of Carol, the social worker. Carol informs Adah that she cannot leave her children unattended and helps by offering to send teenage volunteers. However, it cannot be denied that Carol is placed in the role of a social police, indoctrinating Adah in the tenets of good, normative motherhood. When Carol critiques Adah yet again for allowing her children to be left at the shed before school, Adah is left with no choice but to quit her job. She loses her middle class identity and joins the rolls of the urban underclass dependent on welfare.

companies, whose quest for profit is second only to the cause of 'advancing' Western science and medical knowledge.

As Adah relinquishes her pride and accepts welfare, she recognizes various other working class women who share a similar predicament at the Mansions. For some of the women, like Mrs. King the dole is an opportunity to get out of abusive domestic relationships. For others, like the O'Briens, the dole offers a better chance of survival than a minimum wage job.

Lloyd W. Brown in her analysis of *The Pussy Cat Mansions* has read it as a “microcosm of a caste system based on race, sex, class, and property” (40). This caste system is particularly oppressive to poor women who are single mothers of several children. Thus the Ibo patriarchal system that Adah rejects by divorcing her husband is replicated in the hierarchies of *Pussy Cat Mansions*. Lloyd W. Brown argues that the system represented by the Mansions is profoundly “anti-life,” despite the sexual connotations of the name *Pussy Cat Mansions*. The buildings are built on an old cemetery. Moreover, the institution of the dole makes it more economically viable for a mother to live without her husband. Once included in the welfare rolls, the mothers’ sexual lives are constantly scrutinized. If a single mother forms a new romantic alliance, her dole will be discontinued. Social workers like Carol are entrusted with the job of policing the sexuality of the welfare moms. This only encourages furtive sexual liaisons with an even greater chance of unplanned pregnancies.

Not only is the sexuality of women on welfare under constant surveillance, these women are not allowed to supplement public assistance with any viable employment. Adah secretly works as a charwoman to buy her children Christmas presents. Adah survives the extremely difficult situation by forging friendships with

other poor single women like Whoopey and The Princess. The warmth and intimacy of these women, and their ability to help and support each other is a positive and nurturing experience within the hostile social environment depicted in the novel. However, Lloyd W. Brown has interpreted this fellowship to be of limited value, as it is an association of people who have accepted the hopelessness of their lives.

At the Pussy Cat Mansions, Adah faces the triple oppression of gender, class, and race. As a poor and single mother, her parenting is under constant surveillance by Carol. Her sexuality too is policed, by the welfare agencies. However, she also has to encounter the particular hostilities, which emerge from the perception of her as a racial other. The Smalls are constantly hostile to her, even when they declare that her color does not bother them. One day, at the laundry room, an old white woman refuses to share a machine with her. When Adah demands a four bedroom flat for her family, Mr. Persial lectures her on population control and is clearly prejudiced about her black, female, and fertile body.

Adah is not just subject to racial prejudice in Pussy Cat Mansions. Very often, she tries to play the stereotypical role of the ignorant black female in order to secure white friendship or sympathy. Thus Adah learns to manipulate racial codes, in order to survive a system that is extremely hostile to her. While Adah may be condoned for playing the part of the ignorant or illiterate black immigrant in order to ease her everyday interactions with a hostile white world, she has been the subject of more serious criticism because of the class superiority she displays towards fellow Nigerian immigrants. Emecheta ultimately depicts the transition of Adah from the fate of the ditch dwellers to the status of middle class respectability by the sheer dint of her will.

At the end of *In the Ditch*, Adah has successfully relocated to Regent's Park, a middle class neighborhood. Her real life counterpart Buchi Emecheta herself was able to carve a literary career for herself and make her way out of dependence on the welfare system.

The path towards escape from the dependency of the welfare system posited by Emecheta is that individual exceptionalism. Adah who is able to make the transition because of her determination and talent constantly expresses a sense of superiority over her lesser-educated Nigerian neighbors. Adah seems to internalize many of the hierarchies of a society intensely stratified by race, gender, and class. Instead of being sensitive to the even harsher treatment of those immigrants who do not have her advantage of education, Adah does not feel anything besides hostility for them. Lloyd Brown has even challenged Emecheta's prejudicial presentation of Francis, Adah's husband who unlike Adah is an academic and professional failure.

This ambivalence in Emecheta's presentation of Nigerian men has led to some critics like Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi to argue that Emecheta is preoccupied by the question of the black woman as a victim of black patriarchy, without being equally attentive to the question of racism. Ogunyemi identifies Emecheta as a feminist author and construes feminism to be a Euro-American movement. She does not consider it to be an adequate response to the predicament of black women who have to contend with the dual oppressions of racism and sexism. Ogunyemi posits womanism instead of feminism as a desirable movement, and her model for womanism emerges from the image of the "amiable co-wives of a polygamous African household." While it is true that Emecheta does not subscribe to this

idealization of polygamy and is very concerned in exploring the oppressions meted out to women in traditional African and diasporic communities, it cannot be said that she is not cognizant of the inter-connectedness of race, class, and gender oppressions in the societies she depicts. In *Destiantion Biafra*, the violation of a woman's body becomes the point of entry into a critique of nationalism. Similarly, the depiction of motherhood in *The Joys of Motherhood* becomes a mode of critiquing the harshening of African patriarchy resulting from its encounter with colonialism. In the London novels, the vilification of the poor woman of color and her fertility is a comment on the multiple racial and class oppressions of British society. Her novels dramatize the contradictions inherent in the project of forming alliances between the intellectual and the subaltern.

Buchi Emecheta's fiction like that of the other postcolonial novelists studied so far, oscillates between the social contexts of Nigeria and Britain, the former colony and the metropolitan location of postcolonial migration. In depicting the lives of women in postcolonial societies, whether tribal rural Nigeria or urban post-industrial Britain, Emecheta disrupts any linear teleology of women's emancipation enabled by their migratory, transnational journeys. They are equally subject to the oppressions of traditional patriarchies, as they are to the controls and regulatory mechanisms of the postindustrial nation state. Moreover, her fiction emphasizes the overlapping of the oppressions of race and class with those of gender. Emecheta offers glimpses of female rebellion against the multiple oppressions of national and diasporic patriarchies. However, her representation of successful escape from these structures nearly always operates at the level of exceptional individuals. Although moments of

solidarity between the intellectual and the community of subaltern women is invested with hope and promise, such moments of solidarity whether at the time of a political crisis like the Nigerian Civil War, or acute economic crisis, like urban poverty, cannot be sustained or transformed into a collective movement. This pattern of the investiture of hope in a moment of unity between the intellectual and the subaltern and its subsequent erosion is not presented as tragic. It is merely documented in almost a journalistic, factual, manner, without registering any emotional response. The narrative does not foreground this movement and it is almost a buried strand in the plot of the novel, often focusing on the life of an exceptional woman.

In a sense Emecheta's depiction of partial and tentative alliances between female intellectuals and female subalterns overlaps with the scholarly work of transnational feminists who emphasize in their writings, the difficulties embedded in the project of "imagining alliances" within groups. Wahneema Lubiano in her essay "Talking About the State and Imagining Alliances," examines her own conflicted relationship as an academic with respect to her community, "Because I bear credentials from the academy, I am asked to address particular groups and do certain kinds of work. But those same credentials provide these groups with an occasion to register their own contempt for the intellectual realm generally, and for my specific place in it"(441). In analyzing black nationalism in the US, through the lens of a black feminist critique, Lubiano argues that even black women, a marginal group with respect to their limited influence on US state policy, "reproduce and oppose some of the narrow exclusions that they condemn in 'mainstream' or 'white middle-class' feminism"(442). Narrating her experience of speaking to a group of black

women working in lower rung, clerical jobs about her own situation as a black intellectual, Lubiano describes how the discussion after her presentation of a photograph of a black soldier returning home from the Gulf War led to discussion about the black family and welfare. Lubiano notes how many of these women reproduced the official discourse of vilification of poor women on welfare. As a result, women on welfare emerged as a group with whom these women found "imagining alliances" extremely difficult. In Lubiano's own response she pointed out to the group how they were "performing the kind of exclusions"(448) that they had accused white feminists of. Lubiano reflects that the silence which followed this exchange, produced a tentative understanding of "what we had to undo in order to figure out what to do"(449). She ends her essay by advocating the function of self-criticism on the part of feminists of color in the quest of forming alliances.

Chandra Mohanty, in "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism" after cataloguing various organized movements pertaining to the achievement of political, legal and economic rights, asserts that "not all feminist struggles can be understood from the point of view of 'organized' movements. Questions of political consciousness and self-identity are a crucial aspect of defining Third World women's engagement with feminism"(77). Mohanty goes on to argue that the writing of oral histories, autobiographies, and testimonials become a "significant mode of remembering and recording experiences and struggles"(77). Although she is careful not to valorize all writing produced by third world women as evidence of "decentering of hegemonic histories and subjectivities," she maintains that:

Feminist analysis has always recognized the centrality of rewriting and remembering history, a process that is significant not merely as a corrective to the gaps, erasures, and misunderstandings of hegemonic masculinist history but because the very practice of remembering and rewriting leads to the formation of a politicized consciousness and self-identity. Writing often becomes the context through which new political identities are forged. It becomes the space for struggle and contestation about reality itself (Mohanty 78).

To Mohanty's list of such autobiographical and testimonial writings, which serve to forge political consciousness, I would like to include Emecheta's autobiographical London novels, her novelistic rewriting of the Biafran Civil War, and her novelistic recording of the changes ushered into Ibo tribal life with the advent of colonial modernity. Among the novelists I study, Emecheta's fiction is perhaps most closely modeled after the life experiences of the author. In a sense her novels exemplify the aesthetic goal elaborated by Susie Tharu and K.Lalitha in their Introduction to *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*, "an aesthetic that must undo the strict distinctions between the literary and the social text"(39). Tharu and Lalitha's description of their choice of an aesthetic that displays "what is at stake in the embattled practices of self and agency, and in the making of a habitable world, at the margins of patriarchies reconstituted by the emerging bourgeoisies of empire and nation"(39), is applicable to Emecheta's aesthetic.

Although not displaying a hybrid aesthetic in the effervescent use of bicultural references as in Rushdie, or in the literary conjunction of elite historiographic and

subaltern, parodic perspectives as in Sidhwa, Emecheta's aesthetic choices also express her hybrid cultural formation as a novelist born in Nigeria spending most of her adult life in Britain. Emecheta has spoken about her in between position between English and Ibo languages, in an interview:

The difficulty I have as a writer is one of translation. I just try to keep my English language as simple as possible. It is not my emotional language. Most of my readers do not know my emotional language, Igbo, and it can get quite complicated translating yourself . . . I try to translate literally, not to make rhythm or poetry. When it is translated it becomes flat, we don't get the same rhythm, but I try. . . Nigerian critics say that the language in my books is very simple, too simple, in fact (Jussawala 86).

Thus, Emecheta's own words express the limits placed on her by her bilingualism. Although this places limits on her formal innovations with language, her novels display a hybrid consciousness because she inhabits has a privileged access to the world of oral forms, as well as to the literary print culture of the novel. Cynthia Ward has studied this in relation to her autobiography *Head Above Water*, in which she reproduces the story of how Emecheta was given her name. In the world of her novels, the communal ideology which structures oral forms of story telling is in a dialogic relationship with the ideology of individualism inherent in the culture of literacy, ushered in by an encounter with colonial modernity.

In the same interview, rather than affiliating herself intellectually with African or British literary traditions, Emecheta places herself in the community of

African American women writers like Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor. Feroza Jussawala and Reed Way Dsenbrock read this self-determined affiliation of Emecheta as an example of “how literary affiliations in contemporary literature in English does not respect national frontiers”(83). But even this alliance is somewhat qualified by her criticism of Alice Walker’s representation of clitoridectomy, in another interview with Oladipo Joseph Ogundele, where Emecheta argues that the female circumcision is on the wane as a practice in Africa, and Walker’s denigration of the practice is somewhat sensationalistic, serving to reinforce existing stereotypes about Africa.

Buchi Emecheta’s fiction thus demonstrates a crossing of cultural borders in more than one sense. Not only is her autobiographical experience of migration from Nigeria to Britain expressed in her fiction in the constant negotiation between African and Black British experiences in her fiction, she also performs another kind of border crossing by affiliating herself with the literary traditions of African American women writers. It would not be an exaggeration to say that she affiliates herself not only with her indigenous Nigerian Ibo culture but with the African diasporas in Britain, the US, and the Caribbean. In one of her novels *Gwendolen*, she creates characters who are Caribbean immigrants to Britain, which is a shift from her general depiction of African immigrant communities in Britain. She even attempts to reproduce Caribbean dialects in the dialogues between characters in *Gwendolen*. These examples of crossing territorial, cultural and linguistic borders produce novelistic hybridity in the sense of Mikhail Bakhtin. While this is not the kind of literary hybridity that we find in Salman Rushdie, it nevertheless is an example of diverse social and political experiences of the African diaspora, oral and literary

narrative conventions, world views of individualism and the community entering into a dialogic relationship within the aesthetic form of the novel.¹⁸

Emecheta's widespread popularity in multiple locations demonstrates yet another kind of imaginative crossing of borders. Priya Joshi in her study of the reception of Victorian literature in India has argued that Indian readers were able to perform acts of cultural translation, applying the moral and ethical dilemmas represented in the works of now obscure Victorian writers like G.M W. Reynolds to the very different contexts of their lives in India. I would like to suggest that Emecheta's readers in Britain, Africa, and particularly the US, are able to translate the specific experiences of her encounter with British racism and immigration into the particular contexts of their own lives. The themes in Emecheta's fiction resonate with the experiences of many working class, African American, and Hispanic women in the urban US, particularly with the restrictions imposed on the welfare system in the US and the anti-immigration climate which has begun to criminalize low wage illegal migrants in recent times.

¹⁸ By dialogism here I want to suggest that these competing world views and the different narrative traditions they engender do not get subsumed or contained by the aesthetic form, but that the form of the novel promotes expression of competing ideologies and presents alternative perspectives for reflecting on and influencing experiences in the public sphere.

Chapter 5

The Reinvention of Form: Globalization and the Envisioning of Resistance in the Novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o

Globalization, Nationalism, and the Form of the African Novel

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o occupies a pre-eminent position in the field of post-independent African literature. Along with Chinua Achebe and the Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, Ngugi is considered to be part of a celebrated group of Anglophone African writers. Ngugi's relation to this literary group is more complicated by his own rebellion against English as a primary language of modern African literature. After 1977, Ngugi abandoned English in favor of Gikuyu in his fictional work, although he continues to use English as the language for his non-fictional polemical work and has himself translated his Gikuyu novels like *Devil on the Cross* into English. He is at present working on the English translation of his new novel *Wizard of the Crow*.

The constantly evolving nature of Ngugi's fictional output has generated and sustained a lively critical interest. Joseph McLaren in his essay "Ideology and Form: The Critical Reception of *Petals of Blood*" has traced the debate in the critical reception of Ngugi's later fiction, originating from the question of "the devices of "realistic" fiction and their validity in voicing political imperatives"(73). McLaren traces a range of critical responses to Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* by several eminent critics in Kenya and the West. Ngugi's early novels have generally been interpreted to be in the tradition of social realism, while his later novels, particularly those in

Gikuyu, mark his improvisations with oral forms. However, such boundaries of form are not watertight distinctions in Ngugi's oeuvre. In Ngugi's later novels there is more clearly the emergence of a hybrid aesthetic, which combines elements of European realism with those of African orature. Simon Gikandi, considers Ngugi's later novels to demonstrate his belief in art as an "instrument of knowledge and social change"(Gikandi 33).

In this chapter, I focus on Ngugi's later novels to examine the political position he develops in response to the socio-economic realities of Kenya, on the threshold of transformation by the spread of global capitalism. Ngugi is successful in inventing a form suitable for his political project. Ngugi's novels are important documents in a study of anti-globalization struggles, precisely because they form an alternative archive of the potentialities, contradictions, and limitations of a collective movement against globalization. Unlike a journalistic or photographic archive of the events, which have come to dramatically represent the New Internationalism,¹⁹ there is no precise correspondence of chronology between the writing of these novels and the events in Seattle and Washington D.C. in 1999-2000. In his novel *Devil on the Cross* (1982), Ngugi encapsulates in a literary form, a global meeting of financial institutions, mass protests arising in its wake, and the brutal repression of this uprising, nearly two decades before such events capture world headlines. This provides a unique perspective on the genesis of a global mobilization against transnational capitalism and helps to broaden the geographic and temporal boundaries of what we have come to think of as the New Internationalism.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the events in Seattle and Washington DC, in 2000, and other protests against WTO and World Bank, see Jay Mazur's article, "Labor's New Internationalism"

Although, Ngugi's artistic project is by his own declarations, in the service of his political project, there seem to develop certain contradictions between the evolution of Ngugi's aesthetic and the development of his political position. These contradictions arise because Ngugi's radical imagination is shaped primarily by the legacy of decolonization and national liberation movements. Although Ngugi is deeply aware of the shift to a new form of imperialism, crystallized in the growth of transnational corporations and financial institutions, when it comes to imagining and representing resistance to transnational capitalism, he reverts to the paradigm of an older armed nationalist struggle. While the nation state can be thought of as one space for articulating resistance to the hegemonic reign of global capital, questions remain about the efficacy of nationalist movements to usher in a genuine decolonization in the light of the failure of so many mid-century national liberation movements. Moreover, the rise of ethnic nationalisms in the former Yugoslavia, for example, has produced an excess of violence and the disruption of civilized codes of life. In the light of these events, Ngugi's renewed advocacy of an armed Fanonian nationalism raises questions about the viability of this as a mode of resisting and limiting the unbridled sway of global capital. Although his political goals are avowedly nationalistic and as an extension of this political credo, he advocates vigorously against the hegemony of global English to the extent that he abandons English in favor of Gikuyu in his later novels, Ngugi's actual practice of the aesthetic of the novel cannot sustain such a strict adherence to a pure nationalist, anti-globalization impulse. Thus, while Ngugi exploits many oral conventions in his Gikuyu language novels, he simultaneously draws from western literary traditions that go into the

making of the genre of the European novel. Among the western literary forms that Ngugi reworks in his novels are the Biblical parable, various forms of satire, and the *bildungsroman*. Among the African oral traditions, Ngugi draws on the musical and poetic traditions associated with the gicandi, an instrument made from the gourd, which is played to celebrate many events in the life of the community. It is somewhat inaccurate, therefore, to classify some of Ngugi's novels including *Petals of Blood* as social realist and *Devil on the Cross* as reliant on African orality alone; there is a blurring of various novelistic traditions within Ngugi's oeuvre.

The novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, particularly *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*, constitute a literary response to the emerging realities of neocolonialism in post-independent Kenya, anticipating almost prophetically not only the hegemony of the institutions of global capital but the growth of a collective resistance against it. In embarking on this ambitious project, Ngugi has to virtually reinvent his novelistic craft, assert the linguistic choice of his native Gikuyu, and also conceptualize a new hybrid aesthetic to elaborate his analysis and vision of the new realities. He articulates the hope of a collective struggle, while simultaneously subjecting his optimism to scrutiny. His novels provide a concrete example of the complex interplay of literary works with social movements. This interaction occurs at multiple levels. At the most obvious level, Ngugi's writing of these novels is intimately connected with events in his personal career of cultural activism. The writing and publication of these novels coincide with his involvement in community theater project in Kamiriithu, which was brutally censored, and Ngugi himself was imprisoned and subsequently forced into exile in the US.. This is the autobiographical

background of involvement in a struggle against the neocolonial dictatorial regime of Daniel Arap Moi in Kenya. The personal narrative of an intellectual's involvement with a struggle against neocolonialism is only one layer in the palimpsest of Ngugi's later fiction. Instead of any romanticization of the intellectual in exile, in prison, or away from his native land, or a celebration of an easy solidarity between the intellectual and his native community, precipitated by a collective movement against neocolonialism, there is a constant scrutiny of the precariousness of this tentative alliance.

Ngugi's personal predicament as an intellectual who has been at the forefront of a social struggle for a more egalitarian distribution of power and resources in post-independent Kenya, as well as the campaign to forge a public sphere for analysis and social critique, intersects with the larger issue of the failure of bourgeois nationalism after formal decolonization in Kenya and many other African nations. This is the subject matter that Ngugi's novels insistently return to and ponder over. Ngugi's representation of the failure of decolonization in Kenya traces this phenomenon to the worldwide transition from a colonial economic system to a neocolonial one. He is quite accurate in his analysis of the new phase of capitalist accumulation, with the formation of transnational corporations and financial institutions like the World Bank. These new institutions usher in a phase of flexible capital accumulation, with the former colonial hinterlands once again providing raw materials and labor for the prosperity of a global corporate elite, hand in glove with the acquiescing comprador governments. In Kenya, this accentuates even more sharply the yawning socio-economic gap between the elite and the masses. The new regime of capital and its

ally, the national government, are completely hostile to any attempt at organizing labor and unleash their brutal force on any attempt at protest or mobilization. In depicting these realities of a neocolonial Kenya, Ngugi is accurate in diagnosing the problem to be the incomplete or fragmentary nature of decolonization. He is also accurate in pointing to the transition into a new global economy, one in which the physical presence of a colonial military power is no longer necessary to reap the economic benefits of maintaining a monopoly of raw materials and markets.

Ngugi is also careful to highlight the super-exploitation²⁰ of women in the era of global capitalism. In his later novels, the action revolves and often coheres around a female protagonist who is the victim of multiple layers of exploitation, economic, social, and sexual. In conceptualizing resistance to the exploitation of workers, the censorship of dissent and free speech, Ngugi assigns a role of leadership to his female protagonists. His conception of resistance to globalization encompasses multiple agendas of workers, women, students, and environmentalists. Ngugi gives adequate space to all these disparate strands in the mobilization against global capital. These struggles are interrelated in his analysis. Global capital nurtures repressive local regimes, which perpetuate a climate hostile to debate and dialogue. Global capitalism unleashes newer technologies of exploiting the natural environment, creating in its wake the hazards of drought and desertification. These environmental ravages are registered on the bodies of women, who also have to bear the brunt of a more

²⁰ By super exploitation I am referring to the intensified process of exploitation in global capitalism, whereby women are often subject to sweatshop conditions of labor, denied rights to minimum wages, unionization, sick leave and holidays, and safety standards in the workplace are callously flouted leading to disasters like the fire in the Chowdhury garment factory in Bangladesh. On Nov 25 2000, at least 45 workers including 10 children were burnt to death in a devastating fire at Sagar Chowdury Garment Factory in the Kamanchar BSCIC Industrial Area on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway.

repressive patriarchy emerging in conjunction with the circuits of capital in global market and images reflected in the mass media. Environmental ravages are also intensified with the promotion of a global tourism in Kenya. This thrives in conjunction with the sexual exploitation of women in the sex tourism industry. All these themes emerge in the lives of the female characters Wanja and her grandmother Nyakinyua in Ngugi's novel *Petals of Blood*, in which he tries to express these multiple and inter-related issues of globalization as well as forge a collective struggle against it. Ngugi provides glimpses into all these inter-connected areas of exploitation and envisages a common struggle against all these ills. However, while convincing in his depiction of the inter-connected nature of struggles against capitalist and patriarchal exploitations, Ngugi's novels also render visible the tensions, which arise when differing agendas are encompassed in the forging of a collective struggle.

Although Ngugi is able to provide an accurate social and economic analysis of global capitalism and is able to envision a collective struggle against it, weaving divergent but interlinked oppositions to patriarchy, environmental degradation, loss of cultural freedoms, in his theorization of resistance there is an inevitable fall back to a nationalist alternative to global capitalism. While a part of it stems from Ngugi's agenda in restoring the uniqueness and distinctiveness of African national culture, after the centuries of western cultural hegemony during the colonial period of Kenya's past, the nationalist compulsion also marks a limit to Ngugi's ability to articulate a deeper internationalism. While it may be effective and necessary to remind Kenyans of their history of struggle against colonialism, particularly the armed struggle of the guerrilla Mau Mau warriors at a time of woeful obeisance to a global mass culture,

Ngugi's conception of resistance, infused with a Fanonian understanding of the liberatory potential of a violent, armed struggle is still confined to an African national identity. This in my opinion marks a blind spot in Ngugi's elaboration of a collective struggle against global capitalism. While able to embrace to an extent the imperatives of gender and the environment in a new version of a popular struggle, there is an inadequate theorizing of ethnic and racial diversity within Kenya. This blind spot becomes particularly evident in the many references to Asians living in Kenya.

Asians in Kenya, largely from the Indian subcontinent, represent a class of petty traders, a community of migrants who arrived under the patronage of British imperial rule. In a highly class and color-coded society, they experienced relative privilege over Black Kenyans prompting resentment among the native residents. This phenomenon spread across other countries of East Africa, particularly Uganda. The departure of the British intensified the anger against this second group of foreign settlers. It led to the expulsion of people of Indian origin from Uganda under the reign of the notorious Idi Amin. This history in a country that shares its borders with Kenya should serve as a reminder to the dangers of an exclusive notion of national identity. While the petty bourgeois Indian trader is not free of the charge of exploitation of the Kenyan poor, he seems in Ngugi's oeuvre to become the target also of a more reactionary ethnic resentment. Ngugi in several of his non-fiction prose works has been outspoken about the dangers of tribalism in Kenya. In his novels, he attempts to imagine an inclusive national identity for people of different ethnic backgrounds within Kenya. This does not extend to the question of Asians in Kenya.

Internationalist alliances between various racial and ethnic groups are somewhat beyond the novels' purview. However, in the memories of some characters that are often intellectuals who have traveled to the West, Ngugi presents images of the geographic sweep of global capitalism. There is an attempt, albeit not an extensive one, to see beyond Kenya and Africa, and to depict a fledgling image of an internationalist solidarity of the world's oppressed peoples. However, an inability to think beyond Black nationalism in Kenya contradicts sharply with Ngugi's imagination of a struggle against globalization and his vocal critique of the historic manipulation of ethnic allegiances for the purposes of continuing colonial hegemony. I am not suggesting that nationalism and internationalism are the only two possible options in the horizon of political transformation. However, these seem to emerge as the two most clearly articulated options within Ngugi's fiction. Other possibilities like reform within the existing political system instead of a revolutionary transformation are tenuously suggested but not developed by Ngugi. Once again, I would like to emphasize that this recourse to an exclusive Kenyan nationalism marks a disjuncture in Ngugi's political philosophy and his aesthetic praxis. While he has overtly rejected the notion of cultural hybridity in his non-fiction works like *Decolonizing the Mind*, in which he passionately argues for a return to native African languages and literary traditions, his own example of such an aesthetic endeavor produces novels in Gikuyu, which do not sever their connection with the European novel. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi expresses his criticism of literary practices and cultural exchanges which serve to enhance the literary value of the European novel:

Why, we may ask, should an African writer, or any writer, become so

obsessed by taking from his mother tongue to enrich other tongues? Why should he see it as his particular mission? We never ask ourselves: how can we enrich our languages? How can we 'prey' on the rich humanist and democratic heritage in the struggles of other peoples in other times and other places to enrich our own? Why not have Balzac, Tolstoy, Shokolov, Brecht, Lu Hsun, Pablo Neruda, H.C. Anderson, Kim Chi Ha, Marx, Lenin, Albert Einstein, Galileo, Aeschylus, Aristotle and Plato in African languages?(8).

In this excerpt it is possible to see a subtle shift from Ngugi's repudiation of African writers using their native literary traditions to enrich the genre of the European novel, to an endorsement of the project of introducing European literary conventions into the African language novel. The question remains; what happens when Ngugi translates a novel, originally written in Gikuyu, into English and it is read by a non-Gikuyu speaking reader. Although Ngugi's aim may have been to introduce European genres into the African novel, in the translated version what remains immediately perceptible is the hybridity produced by the interaction of the African and European literary traditions, being utilized for the purpose of an anti-imperialist agenda. The stated political purpose of enriching the African language novel becomes less visible in translation but what remains visible is the interaction of two different literary traditions in the creation of a new African novel that continues the cultural task of resisting imperialism. In my reading of Ngugi's novels, I do not consider the transition from his English novels to Gikuyu novels to be as definitive an aesthetic and political shift as Ngugi has represented it to be. In fact the political project of

resisting imperialism and the related aesthetic task of creating a hybrid African novel that challenges the hegemony of European literary genres is a continuous strain in Ngugi's fiction.²¹ While I admire Ngugi's dedication to the project of revitalizing African languages, particularly his native Gikuyu, I consider it be one aspect in his overall career of cultural activism. As a reader who cannot access the original Gikuyu texts, Ngugi's acts of resisting cultural imperialism are concretized for me through the themes of globalization, neocolonialism, and resistance that he develops as well as the melange of African and European narrative traditions that undercuts the hegemony of the European tradition of the novel. Ultimately, I consider Ngugi to be a postcolonial migrant intellectual because of his location in the US, after being exiled from Kenya. Although Ngugi's own practices of intellectual activism, particularly his decision to write in Gikuyu, casts him much more as a local, grassroots intellectual, his theories of cultural resistance like his fiction has to undergo a process of translation to be accessible and relevant to transnational reading publics who are not Kenyan or Gikuyu. Ngugi's suggested model of a return to native language may not be a viable alternative to many diasporic people for whom the processes of migrations, cultural dislocations and new linguistic influences have resulted in an irrevocable loss of language or the development of hybrid creole languages. I consider Ngugi's novels to be relevant to such readerships, because Ngugi remains a fierce advocate against the regimes of neocolonialism, and an important practitioner and creator of a new form of the novel. Moreover, as I discussed in the Introduction, a return to Gikuyu alone does

²¹ Ngugi alludes to the continuous presence of orature even in his English novels. In the essay "Oral Power and Europhone Glory" collected in *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*, Ngugi writes "My first four novels—from *The River Between* to *Petals of Blood* were all composed in English. And in

not guarantee the bridging of the asymmetries of class in a decolonized society. A return to a national language may in some cases intensify the hegemony of a national elite, in place of a cosmopolitan, anglophone elite. In India, the return to Hindi as the national language has come at the price of marginalization of other regional languages and even Urdu, replacing colonial hegemony with the ascendancy of a Hindu nationalism. I am therefore more interested in exploring the hybrid influences in Ngugi's reworking of the genre of the novel and the ways in which this furthers his overall project of resisting cultural imperialism, rather than his advocacy of a revival of African languages.

In the sections that follow, I discuss Ngugi's creation of an aesthetic to grapple with the depiction of global capitalism, in his works. This is the creation of a hybrid novelistic form, which chiefly employs the genres of Menippean²² satire with some use of elements of tragedy, combining them with indigenous elements of Gikuyu cultural forms like the musical tradition of the *gic'aandi*. I begin with a discussion of *Petals of Blood*, in which Ngugi uses the conventions of social realism to depict the transformation of a community under the pressures of capitalism. It is also a novel, which articulates most persuasively Ngugi's faith in a people's movement against globalization. Yet, even within this optimistic framework, it is possible to see some limitations and contradictions in Ngugi's vision. *Devil on the Cross* uses the genre of

keeping with their europhone tradition I borrowed flavor from African orature—proverbs, riddles, and legends, for instance." (122).

²² For a comprehensive discussion of the distinguishing features of Menippean satire see Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye describes Menippean satire as a genre invented by a Greek cynic named Menippus whose works are lost but whose invention passed on in the works of Petronius and Apuleius. Among the various characteristics of Menippean satire, Frye refers to it as a genre that deals "less with people as such than mental attitudes"(309). It represents abstract ideas and theories, and

Menippean satire to expose the horrors of globalization. However, there is a reversal in the end to the tragic form possibly to create a different relationship between this novel and its audience. *Devil on the Cross* is Ngugi's clearest and most highly developed literary meditation on globalization and an attempt to imagine a struggle against it. It ends on a more despondent note than *Petals of Blood*, with the suppression of a collective movement, and a failure of individual acts of activism. *Devil on the Cross* resonates directly with the trajectory of New Internationalism and a world wide movement against globalization, while *Matigari* and *Petals of Blood*, though still engaged in rethinking popular struggle, revert more to a nationalist conceptual framework. They point more directly to some of the limits of Ngugi's internationalist imagination. This tension between the nationalist and the internationalist impulses of Ngugi's fiction parallels some of the tensions between these two forces in the actual events associated with the New Internationalism. As we know the protests of the AFL CIO over the conferring of most favored trading nation status to China, became a contentious issue in the forging of a global solidarity of labor in Seattle in 1999. Clearly, national identities and ethnicities could not be effectively contained under the imperative of forging a global working class alliance. The complex vectors of the globalization debate thus encompass both the metropolises and the ex-colonies. In recent times, US nationalist criticisms about the outsourcing of technical jobs fail to acknowledge the consumption patterns of the US, which legitimates the outsourcing of unskilled jobs in the production sector to sweatshops in

characters are the mouthpieces of these ideas rather than individuals. Frye's examples of Menippean satirists include Rabelais, Swift and Voltaire.

poorer parts of the globe and the importing of unskilled labor for agricultural jobs like fruit picking and yet express moral outrage at the flight of technical jobs.

In Ngugi's career, the choice and determination to return to Gikuyu is ostensibly a choice to undermine the hegemony of global English. Critics have debated about whether or not this privileges an ethnic identity, while attempting to reverse the erasure of indigenous languages under a colonial episteme. While Ngugi's linguistic decision seems to privilege a nationalist cultural opposition to a global language, in the practice of his novelistic craft there is a no separation of indigenous and foreign literary traditions. European and Gikuyu literary influences proliferate in his novels, and demonstrate a cultural practice, which is internationalist in its ideological underpinning, as well as its formal attributes.

***Petals of Blood* and Realism**

Petals of Blood has been widely read as a novel in the tradition of European realism, before Ngugi launches into his career of the Gikuyu novel. In a more specific manner, it is possible to read *Petals of Blood* as an example of "socialist realism," in the sense defined by Georg Lukacs in *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle*. Lukacs characterizes socialist realism as embodying the perspective of "the struggle for socialism" (*Realism In Our Time* 93). In addition, socialist realism, according to Lukacs, uses a concrete socialist perspective to describe "forces working toward socialism from the inside." Socialist realism in the Lukacsian sense embodies an utopian perspective, a hopefulness in the realization of an ideal of a socialist society. *Petals of Blood* certainly embodies a vision of socialist realism, depicting the

historic transformation of Ilmorg, a small Kenyan town, through its encounter with capitalist modernity and colonialism, followed by disillusionment with political decolonization and ending with the renewal of the struggle towards a more egalitarian society.

Not only in its general political vision but also in the specific careers of its characters, *Petals of Blood* seems to fit the typology of the socialist novel. Lukacs distinguishes the socialist novel as one in which the general pattern of the bourgeois *bildungsroman* is reversed. Unlike the bourgeois *bildungsroman* which takes the hero from childhood to early adult life, in the socialist realist framework, the *bildungsroman* often begins in adulthood and dramatizes a “crisis of consciousness the adult bourgeois intellectual experiences when confronted with socialism” (*Realism in Our Time* 113). Such a crisis is apparent in the character of Karega, who is most obviously the postcolonial intellectual in *Petals of Blood*. In the early part of the novel he is unsure about the nature of his vocation. As the novel progresses, he matures into an intellectual activist, who organizes plantation workers against exploitative conditions.

Although there are many obvious elements of the Lukacsian socialist realist novel in *Petals of Blood*, this novel's complex postcolonial origins cannot yield a linear narrative of progression towards a desired goal of socialism, nor can its formal attributes be a unified mimetic representation of the society it is depicting. There are many distortions of chronology; the action is often presented through the stream of consciousness of four different characters. Elements of modernism, quite often repudiated by Lukacs as antithetical to the goal of socialism, are not banished from

Petals of Blood. Also, *Petals of Blood* celebrates and exhibits many aspects of African orature. African folk songs, rituals, and musical traditions frame many of the narrative sequences, once again disrupting the notion of a unified aesthetic. Thus postcolonial novels embody what Kumkum Sangari has described as a “cultural simultaneity”(902), “a historical sedimentation that results from the physical co-existence over time of different ethnic groups”(901). Sangari has analyzed this “cultural simultaneity,” in the context of Latin American fiction, noting the coexistence of “linear history of the West, which both nests inside and shapes Latin America history, often by erasure”(901). A similar co-existence of the grand narrative of western history with the erased and infrequently recovered African history structures Ngugi's novel and produces its hybrid cultural form.

Petals of Blood encapsulates the history of Ilmorg from its pre-colonial origins, its subsequent encounter with the colonial regime, and its recent decolonization. It is also an accurate documentation and commentary on the shift to a global economy dominated by multinational corporations and financial institutions. The novel records the consequences of Ilmorg's encounter with capitalism, and the transition that it engenders. This encounter alters the pre-industrial fabric of social relations. It ushers in the commodification and degeneration of social customs previously imbued with cultural mysticism. The episode of the theng'eta becomes symptomatic of this transformation. A drink which previously unified the community, and the ritual drinking of which inspired poets and visionaries becomes patented as a modern industrial product and is responsible for Ilmorg's commercial prosperity.

This commodification of theng'eta²³ alters the fabric of social relationships casting Wanja, the heroine, as a petty bourgeois profiteer from the theng'eta business. The novel documents progressive steps in the sweep of the regime of capitalism, a significant transition being the entry of global corporations into the ambit of local capitalism. Also, along with the entry of multi-national companies, there is the simultaneous entry of global financial institutions. The result of the twin operations of these institutions is the rapid impoverishment of the rural peasantry, which is stripped of its land rights. With the commercial success of thengeta, Ilmorg transforms into an industrial city. Urbanization also comes with the entrenchment and accentuation of poverty.

The novel also recuperates a long history of resistance against colonialist and other exploitations, and anticipates a future struggle against the new matrix of power. *Petals of Blood* is considered to be the most utopian and hopeful of Ngugi's novels. Govind Narain Sharma in his essay "Ngugi's Apocalypse: Marxism, Christianity and African Utopianism in *Petals of Blood*", writes:

Petals of Blood is thus scientific in its social analysis, eschatological in its historical framework and prophetic in its moral and spiritual attitude. Ngugi's outlook is deeply influenced by two great traditions of thought, Marxism and Christianity. . . .But African utopianism constitutes the matrix of his apocalyptic vision (Sharma 292).

²³ This process of commodification of a cultural custom is reminiscent of transformation of the Muslim custom of charity in Sembene Ousmane's *Xala*, a process which Frederic Jameson describes in "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" as "archaic customs radically transformed and denatured by the superposition of capitalist relations." (83).

Resistance to various stages and manifestations of capitalism is often conceptualized through the embodiment of women who resist the structures of capitalism. *Petals of Blood* portrays a duality in Ngugi's vision of women. On the one hand women become metaphorically linked with the land, and the loot and plunder it is subjected to becomes crystallized through the metaphor of prostitution. This is a common trope in African literature. On the other hand, resistance too is often conceptualized through the figures of women. In *Petals of Blood*, the heroine Wanja is configured through the patriarchal iconography of the whore and Madonna. However, several marginal female characters like Nyakinyua, Mariammu, and Aknyi represent a variety of female participation in the task of resistance to capitalism. Women are portrayed as storytellers, preservers of history and traditional rituals outlawed by colonialism; they are also the catalysts and active agents in resistance movements.

Finally in attempting to depict a unified struggle against global capitalism, which does not subsume gender but gives it an autonomous space, Ngugi also tries to show the international dimensions of this struggle through the career of the lawyer, who has lived in the US. However, while trying to present the international aspects of this campaign the representation of nationalism within Kenya sometimes eludes the goals of a truly internationalist imagination. At several moments in Ngugi's novels, there is an inadequate meditation on the problem of ethnic differences, which constitute the heterogeneous population of Kenya. A recurrent blind spot is the question of Asians in Kenya. Ngugi's novels impatiently slot them as petty traders and exploiters, suggesting an inability to accommodate them within the newly

decolonized polity. This to me represents a limitation in Ngugi's vision of the creation of a broad based solidarity against capital. Of course a realistic representation of a movement against globalization could represent the difficulties in uniting many diverse agendas under the umbrella of anti-globalization. Ngugi is quite hopeful about the possibility of such alliances in *Devil on the Cross*, for example. However, what I am trying to suggest is that in the representation of Asians in his novels, there is an unconscious and unexamined replay of circulating ethnic prejudice, which sharply contradicts the overall vision of developing solidarities.

The action of the novel, *Petals of Blood* is located in Ilmorg, which at the beginning of the novel is a neglected, underdeveloped small town, but undergoes a dramatic transformation with its integration into the global market. The plot of the novel is structured like a detective story, with the investigation into the murder of three powerful businessmen, Chui, Kimeria, and Mzigo, who were the owners of Ilmorg's Theng'eta Breweries. The novel begins with Inspector Godfrey's investigation into the incident of arson, the burning of Wanja's house and the simultaneous death of the three prominent businessmen. The bulk of the narrative is a flashback from this climactic episode to the incidents, which led up to this violence. This is rendered through the memories of four of Ilmorg's residents who are being questioned in connection with the murder. These are Wanja, Munira, Karega, and Abdulla, all of whom are not natives of Ilmorg, but who for various reasons migrated to the town and became intertwined with the town's history and transformation. Munira and Karega are both intellectuals, who share a similar educational background in Siriana, the famous missionary school, modeled on a British public school system,

which resurfaces in several of Ngugi's novels. Both Munira and Karega have been expelled from Siriana, because of their involvement in two separate strikes at different moments in the school's history. Both come to Ilmorg, and get involved in the running of a primary school. They represent in differing ways a rejection of the legacy of colonial pedagogy and a search for an alternative and more relevant mode of education. Abdulla, is an ex- freedom fighter who was involved with the Mau Mau guerrilla movement. After independence, he witnesses the withering of hopes of egalitarian land redistribution and retreats to the backwaters of Ilmorg to run a small shop and escape from the exposure to the failure of whatever he had fought for.

Wanja is a woman, who in her adolescence was seduced by a predatory old man, who abandons her when she becomes pregnant. She throws her child into a latrine and embarks on a career in prostitution. Later, she is tormented by her act and yearns for a chance at atonement through motherhood. She returns to her grandmother's house in Ilmorg to eke out a living farming, but her career shifts from that of a barmaid and a brewer of local drinks to that of a brothel owner. Through the reminiscences of these four characters we are presented with a picture of the evolution of Ilmorg from a neglected rural outpost to a commercial urban center.

In the structure of the novel, the advent of modernity in Ilmorg is concentrated in Parts 3 and 4 of *Petals of Blood*. In the first two parts, particularly in Part 2, the reader is acquainted with the history of Ilmorg, from pre-colonial times to the present moment, which is a time directly following the national liberation of Kenya. This history rendered mostly through the memories and narratives of Abdulla and Nyakinyua, the grandmother of the female protagonist Wanja, is a collective history

of resistance to oppressions, and reconfiguration of a sense of cultural identity for the inhabitants of Ilmorg. It is after the attainment of a sense of a community, engendered through the collective action of all Ilmorg residents marching to Limuru to protest against the prevalence of drought in their area, that Ngugi depicts the transition of this community under the influence of a capitalist economy, increasingly integrated with the global market.

At the end of Part 3 of *Petals of Blood*, modernity obtrudes into the fabric of Ilmorg society, with the crash of the airplane near Wanja's hut. The airplane crash is symbolic of the radical thrust into modernity for sleepy, rural Ilmorg. The plane crash is a catalyst for Wanja's entrepreneurial brain wave, of serving the crash victims with food and the traditional drink of theng'eta, the art of brewing of which she has acquired from her grandmother, Nyakinyua. "It was an immediate success" the narrator reports. "Toward the end of the week, people were coming there as much to taste Theng'eta as to see the plane. Theng'eta was soon rumored to possess all qualities from giving fertility to barren women to restoring potency to aging men" (257).

This marks a transformation in the role and function of this intoxicating drink in the history of the Ilmorg community. Prior to the plane crash, readers have already been introduced to the mythological stature of Theng'eta in the Ilmorg community. After the bountiful harvest in Elmore, which follows the season of drought and collective action by the residents against it, in the form of a long protest march to the city, Wanja had described the significance of Theng'eta in the political and cultural history of Ilmorg:

Nyakinyua says that they used to brew it before Europeans came. And they would drink it only when work was finished, and especially after the ceremony of circumcision or marriage or itwika, and after a harvest. It was when they were drinking Theng'eta that poets and singers composed their words for a season of Gichandi, and the seer voiced their prophecy. It was outlawed by the Colonialists (*Petals* 204).

With the outlawing of the production of this indigenous drink, the art of making the drink is also lost, except to a handful of elders like Nyakinyua. After the harvest, and the circumcision ceremonies for the young men of the tribe, Wanja, encourages her grandmother to re-introduce the Ilmorg community to the art of making Theng'eta.

While the Theng'eta is being brewed, the Ilmorg residents start singing traditional songs. Abdulla and Nayakinyua fare much better in the performance of these songs, than Kaarega and other the other youngsters. Nyakinyua in particular sings of the recent troubles of the Ilmorg community, their epical journey to the city, and of past journeys of ancestors. She is a living archive of the tribe's history. It is Nyakinyua who alerts the Ilmorg residents of the visionary and magical powers that are induced by the drinking of Theng'eta: "Squeeze Theng'eta into it and you get your spirit. Theng'eta. It is a dream. It is a wish. It gives you sight, and for those favored by God it can make them cross the river of time and talk with ancestors" (*Petals* 210). True to Nyakinyua's predictions, the drinking of this ancient drink does trigger buried memories and brings forth the deepest confessions from some of the characters.

This first episode of the revival of Theng'eta is thus charged with a sense of recapturing a communal identity and culture, long suppressed by the forces of colonialism. It is an act of celebrating the survival of the Ilmorg community against the ravages of war, famine, and sickness. It is also an act of renewing a relationship with the community, by a deeper awareness of personal history and its interplay with the larger history of the community. However, this almost utopian moment is rapidly transformed in Wanja's act of selling Theng'eta. It marks the commodification of an authentic cultural practice for the purpose of quick profit. This marks the beginning of the prevalence of market values in Ilmorg society. A precious cultural heritage becomes a commodity that is marketed, and exchanged for cash. Munira, in his quest to woo Wanja, coins a catchy slogan to popularize and sell the drink to those who are unaware of its history. Though Wanja rejects the slogan, it spreads in popular usage as does the consumption and sale of theng'eta. Wanja and Abdulla become successful business partners.

The establishment of the Theng'eta business²⁴ by Wanja and Abdulla alerts us to the first step into the transition into a market economy for Ilmorg, but the more decisive leap into the arena of global capitalism occurs, when Wanja and Abdulla's business is acquired by the local businessman, Mzigo. Under the management of Mzigo, the enterprise, which had really been a small-scale home business, takes the

²⁴ Unlike Frederic Jameson's controversial thesis "all third world texts are necessarily allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will national allegories" (69), I am not attempting to read *Petals of Blood* as a national allegory. Like Jameson I believe that many third world texts do have a "political dimension," however I do not think that this political dimension is expressed through a reworking of the genre of allegory. In *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi is offering us an alternative to the official colonial version of Kenyan history by a recuperation of communal memories, rituals, and customs.

shape of an industrial corporation. The narrator reports this metamorphosis in a mock-heroic style, deeply imbued with irony:

Theng'eta Breweries which, starting on the premises owned by Mzigo, had now grown into a huge factory employing six hundred workers with a number of research scientists and chemical engineers

The breweries were owned by an Anglo-American international combine but of course with African directors and even shareholders. . .

.Long live the New Ilmorg! Long live Partnership in Trade and Progress (*Petals* 281).

Not only does the manufacture of Theng'eta become a corporate enterprise, with the increase in foreign ownership, this transition also heralds the beginning of monopolistic trade practices. First, Wanja is stripped off her right to brew Theng'eta after she sells off her business. This is done by the patenting of the theng'eta drink by the foreign corporation. In the rising anti-globalization movements, the issue of the patenting of indigenous agricultural products like seeds and Basmati rice has produced a variety of critiques by scholars like Vandana Shiva, as well as many grass-roots campaigns by activists against the stealing of centuries of indigenous knowledge, by corporations who then claim that they are their own inventions and therefore worthy of the special privileges claimed by patents. Patents thus deny traditional societies their due recognition and acknowledgment for the mass marketing of many indigenous products and also deny them access to those very products because of the high prices, which the monopoly of the patent is able to confer on the product. This issue has become a particularly contentious one with

regard to AIDS medicines, patented by pharmaceutical companies. In 2001, Brazil declared that it would flout the patent for the AIDS drug nelfinavir(viracept) established by the American pharmaceutical company Roche, in order to produce cheaper generic versions of the drug to treat its population affected by AIDS. In a way, the denial of theng'eta brewing rights to Wanja is a prophetic moment in the text, intimating in 1977, the spreading tentacles of transnational corporations in the lives of many agricultural societies.

The passage into modernity for Ilmorg is also heralded by the construction of the Trans Africa Roadway. The building of this road alters social relationships in Ilmorg society, fundamentally. It destroys the huts of Mwathi, who the citizens of Ilmorg have long believed to be the guardian spirit of their community. Moreover, it facilitates the entry of global financial institutions into the region, which disrupts traditional patterns of agriculture and land ownership. The novel mentions that “the demarcation and the fencing of land,” precipitated by the construction of the road had deprived tillers and herdsmen of their hitherto unquestioned rights of use and cultivation(273). This forces many to hire themselves out as wage laborers. Land rights is a theme which is constant preoccupation in the novel's trajectory, surfacing many times in the course of Ilmorg's and its citizens' histories. James Ogude in *Ngugi's Novels and African History* notes “According to Ngugi, the single most important virtue of traditional African society was common ownership of land which was worked for the common good. When the white colonialists appropriated the land, conflict and general suffering ensued” (27). Elsewhere, Ogude links this struggle for land rights to the Agikuyu myth of origin:

Land, which is at the heart of the struggle was designated by God, Murungu to the Agikuyu founders: Gikuyu and Mumbi. If political freedom in Kenya becomes synonymous with repossession of the land, the spiritual and moral justification for the quest for freedom lies in the fact that this land is linked to the spiritual right of the people, the Agikuyu (21).

In *Petals of Blood*, we witness the alienation of the Gikuyu peasantry from their land, under the colonial regime, in the experiences of a squatter like Mariammu, Karega's mother, who is a worker in the pyrethrum plantation of Waweru. Mariammu demands cultivation rights from Waweru/ Ezekiel. During the Mau Mau struggle, land is of paramount importance. Oliver Lovesey in his book *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o reminds* us that the formal name of the Mau Mau organization was the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (9). In the brief glimpses of the Mau Mau struggle that we see in the reminiscences of the characters, the violence of the guerrilla warfare is directed towards the goal of redistribution of land. However, political decolonization does not fulfill the dream of land rights. The struggle for land redistribution is depicted as a perpetual struggle towards an evanescent goal. The lawyer who helps the people of Ilmorg, when they demand political audience and aid for the imminent famine they face, goes on to become an advocate for land ceilings.

However, with the entry of institutions like the African Economic Bank, a new wave of landlessness ensues. Small farmers are lured into debts and promised technical assistance for the cultivation of cash crops. They often have to sign away their title deeds as security for these loans. Often, they are unable to make the profits

they had hoped they would make. They are also unable to control the prices of cash crops, because they are determined by larger forces of the market, over which they have very little control. Forced to sell their crops, at low prevailing prices, they are unable to pay off debts. The financial institutions then claim their lands. This is precisely what happens to Nyakinyua, the grandmother of Wanja, and the storyteller, wine brewer, and oral historian of Ilmorg. At the end of her life she receives a notice for the confiscation of her farm by the bank. Nyakinyua's predicament encapsulates in a microcosm, the predicament of many third world peasants and workers under the operations of the World Bank's economic policies.

Petals of Blood chronicles the impoverishment of peasants, with the influx of corporations and financial institutions. It also depicts the rapid urbanization of Ilmorg, an urbanization, which is clearly stratified along the line of class. Ilmorg develops into Cape Town and New Jerusalem, the former containing the homes of farm managers, bank officials and corporate elites, while the latter is a "shantytown of migrant and floating workers, the unemployed, the prostitutes" (*Petals* 280). This is clearly a prefiguration of the growing economic disparities, in the global city, with its visible signs of consumerism, and its invisible underbelly of poverty and exploitation.

Another arena in which we witness the catapulting of Ilmorg and Kenya into a global economy, under conditions of neocolonialism, is in the sector of tourism. Long before Wanja's foray into the Theng'eta business, she encounters the sinister German tourist, who she accompanies home in the hope of exchanging sexual favors for money. The fantastical nature of the blatantly fabricated narrative of this man and his

posturing as a human rights campaigner is pregnant with sinister possibilities, which reach a climax when in his bedroom, Wanja sees the multiple distorted images of this man's predatory dog. This scene in the novel is powerful because of its tremendous restraint and its ability to evoke through symbolic suggestion the horrors of international trafficking and prostitution of women.

Wanja's encounter with the German tourist is a prelude to the tourism boom, which is ushered into Ilmorg with the building of the Trans Africa Road and the arrival of financial institutions like the African Economic bank. The novel chronicles the setting up of tourist centers and game parks, restricting access of subsistence farmers and grazers to these areas. Most significantly, Wanja becomes the owner of a brothel, which springs up in conjunction with the growth and corporate management of the theng'eta brewing business and the development of Ilmorg into a commercial center. Wanja quickly adopts the prevailing commercial ethic of the new town. She tells Munira, who has always desired and pursued her, "This is New Kenya, you want it, you pay for it" (*Petals* 279), demanding money, before sleeping with him. This is a powerful and chilling moment in the text, because it is a stark representation of the commodification of the most intimate relations. We have known about Wanja's former career as a barmaid, which is often an euphemism for prostitution, but in all the previous encounters, Wanja was presented as a victim, being preyed upon by powerful men. This scene marks a shift from Wanja, the pathetic victim of a youthful seduction to a shrewd, street-smart Wanja, who has learnt how to manipulate the sex market. This trend was also however nascent in her tentative foray as an entrepreneur in the theng'eta business.

The place of Wanja in *Petals of Blood* is interesting and controversial. She is the female protagonist and the link between the three other male characters, all of who desire her, at one point or another in the novel. She is the heroine of a novel employing the conventions of social realism, but she is also an allegorical representation of the land, Ilmorg, and even Kenya. This trope of conflating a woman with the nation has been seen in many nationalist discourses, including South Asian colonial and postcolonial narratives. In the novels of Salman Rusdie and Bapsi Sidhwa the female body becomes the symbolic location of national honor, and the novels' depictions of the violations of the female body are symbolic of a community's loss of honor. In Ngugi's *Petals Of Blood*, Wanja is conflated with her community. James Ogude discusses the "long standing iconography of women in nationalist literature which inevitably mobilizes women as the central metaphor of the nation"(109). According to Ogude, Ngugi's female protagonists become "the primary sites for testing the reconciliation of ethnicity and nation, tradition and modernity, betrayal and hope, and indeed the possibility of rebirth. In the latter texts however, women protagonists become an index, a reflection of the state of the nation" (109). Ogude argues that for Ngugi, prostitution is symbolic of degradation. Ngugi, does not see prostitution as a means by which women might have been subverting some of the relations of power in a colonial patriarchy. Ogude writes: "Prostitution is thus presented at another level, as an indicator of the state of the nation in Kenya. Kenya's position of dependency in the world economy is likened to prostitution as a social institution. It is a mirror to the economic prostitution of postcolonial Kenya" (106).

Wanja's destiny seems to be intimately intertwined with that of Ilmorg. During the time of Ilmorg's drought, she is tormented by her barrenness. At the time of the harvest, she regains a sense of her femininity through her relationship with Karega. She is identified constantly with the luxuriant natural landscape. After the transition of Ilmorg into a commercial urban center, she undergoes a metamorphosis into a petty capitalist, and then a brothel owner. In the end, her brothel is destroyed in the fire, set off by Munira, who under the influence of a fanatical sect of Christianity, wants to save Karega from her powers. At the end of the novel she is overjoyed to find out that she is pregnant with Abdulla's child. Ogude interprets this transition into motherhood as being an allegorical representation of national rebirth and regeneration. In interpreting this schematic transformation of Wanja from a prostitute to a mother, Ogude locates in Ngugi's assumptions, "a male stereotypical image of the prostitute woman as degenerate and immoral." This assumption is revealed not only in the fanatically religious Munira's repudiation of Wanja but also in Karega's confrontation with her. According to Ogude, Wanja has to go through a purging, through the symbolic iconography of fire. It is only after her brothel, a place of exploitation of other women is destroyed that she can advance to motherhood. Ogude suggests that "Ngugi privileges class struggle over gender issues"(119), and that only after Wanja's role as brothel owner ends, and she is no longer an exploiter of workers or women is she able to achieve her liberation from what she perceives as the punishment of childlessness, for abandoning her first born.

I tend to agree with Ogude's analysis of the portrayal of Wanja, to a certain extent. It is true that Ngugi conflates Wanja's destiny of prostitution with Kenya's

exploitation by the forces of globalization, and the whore/Madonna split in Wanja's career emanates from a patriarchal mythology, that Ngugi does not sufficiently interrogate. However, Wanja is not the only female character that Ngugi creates. Even within *Petals of Blood*, one can argue that Nyakinyua, Wanja's grandmother, is another very important female character. She is the symbolic repository of the Gikuyu tribe's past, just as Wanja is an embodiment of the present. Nyakinyua is represented as an oral historian of Ilmorg, she sings of the great and momentous events in the tribe's history. Her stories keep up the flagging spirits of the Ilmorg people during their arduous march to the city. She revives the tradition of singing bawdy and insulting songs, as a part of a contest during circumcision ceremonies, and she carries in her memory the art of making theng'eta, which she passes on to her granddaughter, Wanja. When the life of Ilmorg changes, with the advent of modernity, she loses the rights of ownership to the land she has been tilling for years, to a bank. In a way, she is representative of the fact that most of globalization's costs are registered on the lives of poor women. Just like Wanja, she too is a victim of super-exploitation, by the forces of corporate power and financial institutions. However, she represents an urge to organize, agitate and protest against this situation. Even as an old woman, she refuses to relinquish her right to her land and tries to mobilize others who have been given eviction notices. In a way then, Ngugi already in *Petals of Blood* conceptualizes resistance, in the actions of women. In this novel, resistance to globalization is articulated mainly through the careers of two male characters, Karega, and the unnamed lawyer. But the heroism of Nyakinyua' protest cannot be underplayed., and

it anticipates further exploration of the question of gender in Ngugi's next novel *Devil on the Cross*.

Karega's activism against the spreading tentacles of global corporate power in Ilmorg takes two specific forms. As a scholar and an intellectual, he is deeply invested in educational activism, particularly geared towards reversing the injuries inflicted by colonial pedagogy in Kenya. He rebels against a Euro-centric framework of knowledge that erases African history and culture. In his personal quest to relearn the history of his people he is disappointed with conventional historiography, which is silent about people's everyday acts of protest and survival against the regimes of colonial oppression. In the end, it is only when he turns towards oral testimonies, like the narratives of Nyakinyua, that he is able to find a way out of the impasse in his previous scholarship. He is deeply committed to a political agenda in his work as a teacher and runs into a dispute with his colleague and supervisor, Munira, who believes in impartial, neutral, fact based knowledge, devoid of political interpretation. Karega is firm in his conviction that it is impossible to teach without a commitment to one kind of political ideology or another. This refusal to toe the line eventually costs Karega his job, paving the way for his second stage in the career of activism. He becomes an itinerant worker in plantations and factories, organizing workers, wherever he goes. This finally brings him to the Theng'eta factory, where he organizes the work force to demand a pay raise from the factory management, whose local heads are Chui, Kimeria, and Mzigo.

After the fire in Wanja's house, which kills the owners of the Theng'eta Breweries, and the arrest of Karega, among others, he receives the news of the death

of his mother Mariammu, in prison. This produces a feeling of despondency in Karega, at the thought that his mother's lot as a squatter had not changed in all the days of her life. He receives a visit from Akinyi, a woman who worked in Theng'eta Breweries who informs him that peasants and workers in Ilmorg were organizing. Thus Akinyi represents a continuity of the struggle against corporate exploitation.

Although Karega is depicted as the character who takes the leading role in activism against globalization, he is shown to be dependent at crucial times, on the help of female characters. Nyakinyua rescues him from the impasse he faced in his study of African history and after his imprisonment Akinyi reassures him of the continuation of the movement, even in his absence. *Petals of Blood* ends more optimistically than any of Ngugi's other novels. This hopeful moment is articulated through the consciousness of Karega, but it is in his vision of all the women he has known, and their struggles, which embody for him the vision of a better world in the future. Ngugi captures this in the final passage of the novel:

He looked hard at her, and then past her to Mukami of Manguo Marshes and again back to Nyakinyua, his mother, and even beyond Akinyi to the future! And he smiled through his sorrow.

Tomorrow . . . tomorrow . . .' he murmured to himself (*Petals* 345).

These last lines have been interpreted as a deferral, albeit optimistic of a concrete program of change. However, for me the significance of this utopian vision is that it is conceptualized through the examples of various women and their struggles. Thus even if Wanja's transformation from a prostitute to mother is imbued with patriarchal assumptions, for Ngugi, the struggles of women are central to a collective

mobilization against globalization. This gets elaborated in the presentation of Waringa in *Devil on the Cross*.

Ngugi is also attempting in *Petals of Blood* to articulate a critique of ethnic conflicts, in his vision of a struggle against globalization. He is deeply aware that capitalism accentuates ethnic differences in an effort to disrupt solidarities. He is very critical of the new oath-taking rituals that Munira and others are subjected to, which parody Mau Mau traditions and promote ethnic enclaves that are deeply divided. One of the moments in the text when we are made aware of the dangers of ethnic chauvinism is when Wanja's hut is set on fire by her acquaintances, who resent the fact that as a prostitute in the city, she bestows her favors on a Somali driver. In spite of yearning for an internationalist alliance of labor against the interests of capital, and struggling to rearticulate a pluralistic idea of the Kenyan nation that does not privilege any single ethnic group there are elements in the text, which point to the difficulties of this project and undercut Ngugi's declared project.

There exists in *Petals of Blood*, a deeply ambivalent attitude about Asians in Kenya. Ngugi has written about the tripartite division of colonial Kenyan society, with very little interaction among Blacks, Asians, and whites. In narrating the history of Ilmorg, there is an important mention of the story of Shhaji Dharamshah, a man of Indian origins, who opens up a convenience store in Ilmorg profiting at the expense of his black customers. He even starts a relationship with a black woman, during his wife's absence and has a son by her, who he only half acknowledges. Ole Masai, grows up, feeling very alienated because of being biracial. Later he becomes a Mau Mau warrior and sends a threatening letter to Dharamshah, asking him to leave

Kenya. Dharamshah is so frightened that he leaves, and the shop is bought over by Abdulla. This story is presented as a narrative of the Kenyan people's fight and triumph against an oppressor. The narrative celebrates unabashedly the triumph of the black or African part of Ole's heritage over his Asian part. There seems to be an essentialist notion of pure racial identity, surfacing here, in spite of Ngugi's professed disgust with ethnic essentialisms. Clearly, although he wants to repudiate chauvinism of tribal identities, the effort to reverse previous tripartite hierarchies between whites, Asians, and blacks, often leads to another kind of exclusionary identity being privileged, clearly the one of race. Thus, in spite of the longing for a global working class solidarity, the blind spots in Ngugi's representation of Kenyan identity point to the difficulties in forging a collective struggle against global capitalism. However *Petals of Blood* represents Ngugi's vision of partial successes in the careers of several characters who can be seen as intellectual activists.

In *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi offers at least three models of the postcolonial intellectual. In the career of Karega, we have the most obvious representation of the postcolonial intellectual's career as an activist first and foremost of curricular reform. In this, Karega's career parallels his creator's. Both reject the legacies of colonial pedagogy and seek to institute alternative models of learning which do not perpetuate the regimes of cultural imperialism. In this task of rejecting and revising colonialist historiography, Karega reaches a kind of an impasse till he encounters Nayakinyua, who can be thought of as an organic intellectual in Antonio Gramsci's sense. Nyakinyua has no formal education but she is immersed in the oral history, traditions, and rituals of her tribe. It is through his interaction with her that Karega is introduced

to poetic traditions like the gicaandi. Nyakinyua provides Karega with a model for a revisionist pedagogy and an alternative historiography. This endeavor of collecting oral testimonies of people's everyday acts of protest, survival, and triumph parallels projects like Subaltern Studies in India which attempt to write Indian history from non-elite perspectives, privileging non-traditional sources of historiography. Karega's later career expands beyond the horizon of education reforms. He becomes an organizer of plantation laborers.

Besides Karega and Nyakinyua, another character in *Petals of Blood* who can be considered as a model for the postcolonial migrant intellectual is the lawyer. He is the man who saves Wanja from the clutches of the German tourist, and who also helps the Ilmorg citizens to get an audience with their elected representative Nderi. He is very critical of the capitalist system that he describes as the "monster god" (165). When he narrates his life experiences, we are for the only time in the novel, taken out, beyond the borders of Kenya. The lawyer's academic career had taken him to the US, where he observed the experience of American blacks, under conditions of racism. He also witnesses poverty and unemployment in American cities like Chicago. "Then I saw in the cities of America white people also begging"(166), he reports. He returns home to Kenya, to realize that in post-independent Kenya, they were serving the same "monster god" that they were in America. This is a very important moment in the text, because it marks a broadening of concerns, beyond the territorial boundaries of Kenya, and even Africa. We have seen in the career of the chief intellectual/activist Karega that his primary agenda was the revisioning of education to focus on African curriculum and the organizing of peasants and workers

in Ilmorg and other places in Kenya. The lawyer's analysis of the problem gives the struggle within Kenya an international framework and context. It is with the awareness of the enormous sweep of global capitalism, that the lawyer begins his campaign to institute land ceilings for plantation owners. The career of the lawyer is thus an interesting juxtaposition of the local and global dimensions of intellectual activism. Although Ngugi seems to privilege the local, over the cosmopolitan or migrant varieties of the postcolonial intellectual, not only in his passionate advocacy of African languages but also in the models of intellectual activism that he represents in his fiction, the case of the lawyer is an interesting departure. The career of the lawyer demonstrates that the national and diasporic spaces in the postcolonial world need not be antithetical. In the lawyer's life his exposure to the realities of racism in the US sharpens his political consciousness and renews his commitment to the local issue of land ceilings for which he becomes a vigorous campaigner.

Ngugi thus creates a transnational intellectual in the figure of the lawyer. But in Ngugi's imagination the migrant intellectual returns to his local place of origin and uses the experiences and perspectives of his transnational experience to become a crusader for local issues. Unlike Rushdie, the metropolis does not figure as a place of migrant intellectual activism. This privileging of the national terrain as a space for intellectual activism also finds a parallel in the aesthetic choice of privileging orature,²⁵ even when *Petals of Blood* is very much in the tradition of European

²⁵ Ngugi gives us a history of the term orature in his essay "Oral Power and Europhone Glory" anthologized in *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*. According to Ngugi the term was coined by the Ugandan linguist and literary theorist Pio Zirimu, who defined the term "as the use of utterance as an aesthetic means of expression" (*Penpoints* 111). According to Ngugi, Zimuru used it to "connote a system of aesthetics, an oral narrative system for instance, which could be differentiated from a system of visual narratives. The visual systems—from the written to the iconic in the cinema—were seen as more derivative of the oral

realism. Although this novel was not written in Gikuyu, in its evocation of many oral forms of storytelling and community rituals, it already anticipates Ngugi's later experiments in the novel. Ngugi already inaugurates the hybrid form of the postcolonial novel in *Petals of Blood*. Although it follows the conventions of socialist realism, *Petals of Blood* contains many elements of African orature, particularly in narrative structures which enact conditions of group reception of stories as for example in Nyakinyua's narratives of Ilmorg's histories during the ritual drinking of theng'eta. Like his character Karega who resists colonial historiography and strives to institute reforms by incorporating marginalized oral histories in the rewriting of history, Ngugi is attempting to recreate the social realist novel by incorporating into it conventions of African orature.

Devil on The Cross: Fashioning a New Aesthetic

Devil on the Cross, (1982) continues many of the themes originating in *Petals of Blood*, but it also marks a significant shift in Ngugi's political and aesthetic concerns. Thematically, this novel is much more directly about globalization, and resistance, and the colonial struggle is evoked more in the sense of historical background, than the immediate context of the novels. Although *Petals of Blood* also depicts post-independent Kenya, there is a sense that not too much time has passed since the violent anti-colonial struggle. *Devil on the Cross*, although written in 1982, has much more of a feeling about dealing with contemporary realities of globalization, and the mobilization against it. Linguistically and aesthetically, it is

Ngugi's first novel written entirely in his native Gikuyu. Written on rolls of toilet paper, during his detention in prison, the experience of which is chronicled in his prison memoir *Detained*, Ngugi has described *Devil on the Cross* as "the appropriation of the novel into the oral tradition." (*Decolonizing the Mind* 83). Simon Gikandi in considering the literary tradition of this novel has written that the genealogy of the novel is "schizophrenic"(Gikandi 210). It displays according to Gikandi, "Ngugi's troubled relationship with his British liberal education and Gikuyu cultural nationalism"(210). Gikandi argues that while *Devil on the Cross* does represent Ngugi's turn to orality, the structure of the work and its ideas, including the Faustian theme, belong to the European literary tradition. Instead of viewing the novel's lineage to be schizophrenic, I think it is more productive to interpret this novel to be Ngugi's successful inauguration of a hybrid aesthetic form. Although in his non-fictional prose, especially in *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi has rejected the idea of hybridity in postcolonial African fiction stating that in this fusion European elements of style are always privileged over the African and he has declared his allegiance to the primacy of Gikuyu in his works, the prevalence of a hybrid aesthetic, drawing from both European and African traditions, is undeniable in *Devil on the Cross*. Moreover, in this creative cross-fertilization, there is no privileging of one tradition over the other. The European and the Gikuyu elements mesh seamlessly in the novel and further Ngugi's political and aesthetic project.

Although, *Devil on the Cross* is more centrally engaged with globalization and the movement against it, anticipating events we have come to categorize as the New Internationalism, it does not carry within it the same degree of faith in a collective

struggle against imperialism that *Petals of Blood* did. It depicts the worst excesses of corporate globalization, through a central episode of a meeting of the heads of world financial and trade organizations, as well as a mobilization against this meeting by workers, peasants, and students which is brutally repressed by the violent apparatus of a neocolonial police state. The novel ends not with a vision of collective struggle, but with an individual act of violent revenge, articulated in a mode which is distinctly reminiscent of classical tragedy. As I discuss Ngugi's political concerns with regard to the movement against globalization, I would also like to explore the transition of the novel from a predominantly satiric mode to a tragic one and the significance of this shift in connection with Ngugi's relationship with his audience.

In *Devil on the Cross*, we witness an exacerbation of the costs of globalization, in the lives of the characters. The heroine of the novel Wariinga, at the beginning of the novel, has lost her job as a typist and has also been evicted from her home. She is so overcome with dejection that she even attempts to throw herself on the road but is saved by a stranger. Wariinga tells the stranger the outlines of the story of her life, through the device of creating a fictional alter ego, Kareendi. In broad canvass strokes, Kareendi is a young girl who becomes pregnant before marriage. Wariinga offers two possibilities for the father. He could be a young, poor student or a rich old man. In any case, irrespective of his station in life, Kareendi's lover denies any responsibility for the pregnancy, but Kareendi decides to keep the baby. Following the birth of the child, she tries to advance her career by acquiring a high school certificate and learning typing and shorthand. When she attempts to locate a job, she finds that there is always the expectation that she will dispense sexual favors

along with her typing skills. After much difficulty, she does find a job that does not carry this expectation, overtly. However, after a few months, Mr. Boss Kihara begins to proposition her. When Kareendi refuses, he dismisses her from the job, and soon after that she is evicted from her humble apartment. This pushes her to the verge of suicide, from which she is rescued by the stranger who hears her tale.

Wariinga boards a matatu driving to Ilmorg. In this vehicle, we are introduced to other characters. One of them is Wangari, a destitute peasant woman, who does not have enough money for her fare. When the driver and owner of the matatu learns this, he stops the vehicle and orders her to leave, paying no heed to the fact that she would be stranded in the middle of the forest. This arouses the compassion of a few of her fellow travelers, who volunteer to pay for her ride.

This action creates a sense of a community and fellowship within the matatu, although it is being driven by a ruthless petty capitalist, who is later revealed to be a more nefarious character having links with organized crime. The kindness of her fellow passengers prompts Wangari to recount her life story. She had been a freedom fighter, during the time of the Mau Mau insurgency. However, she falls into penury, after her small farm is auctioned off by the Kenya Economic Progress Bank, when she is unable to pay off a loan she had taken from the bank, to keep grade cows. This loan proves to be a costly burden, because her cow first gives birth to a bull, not increasing the milk supply and then dying of a disease. This forces her to migrate to the capital city in search of itinerant work. In the city, not only is she unsuccessful in finding any employment, but she is arrested under the provisions of new vagrancy laws. She manages to plead her case and persuade the judge to release her, on the

declaration that she is not a thief and can, in fact, find real thieves for the court, if she is released. Although she escapes, the court fines her, and so she is left without any money to return to her hometown, Ilmorg. Wangari's narrative of pauperization is reminiscent of Naykinyua's predicament in *Petals of Blood* and re-emphasizes the impoverishment of the rural peasantry under the growing influence of global financial institutions, and their local functionaries.

Along with Wariinga and Wangari, we are also introduced to Muturi in the matatu. He is a factory worker, who has recently lost his job, because he had attempted to organize his coworkers to go on a strike to protest against the slave wages that were being paid to them. The strike was foiled by the mobilization of armed policemen. The workers were informed that all strikes had been banned in Kenya, and the leaders of the strike like Muturi were dismissed from their jobs. On comparing their employers, Wariinga and Muturi realize that both of them were working for Boss Kihara. They recognize the similarity of their predicaments of dismissal because of a refusal to accept exploitation, economic in the case of Muturi, and sexual in the case of Wariinga. This recognition produces a feeling of solidarity. Ngugi seems to be conceptualizing class and gender based oppressions as allied and seeking to create an imaginative coalition that integrates these diverse agendas.

More dramatically than these narratives of exploitation, the condition of Kenya under a neoliberal global economy is revealed in the central episode of the novel, the meeting of modern thieves. The first name given to this meeting is "The Devil's Feast," the title mentioned in the invitation card that Wariinga receives from the stranger who saves her from her suicide attempt in Nairobi. It is Mwireri Wa

Mukiraai, another passenger in the matatu, who insists that The Devil's Feast is a scandalous misnomer for the meeting. He informs the others that the feast has been arranged by the Organization for Modern Theft and Robbery to commemorate the visit of representatives from the International Organization of Thieves and Robbers. This play with the nomenclature of the meeting and the organization sponsoring the event is very interesting. Ngugi deliberately avoids names and acronyms, which are value neutral, like the World Trade Organization. Instead of words like free trade, or capitalism, he constantly uses the terms theft and robbery, in part to provoke and shock his audience into an awareness of realities of globalization. Ngugi deliberately strips global capitalism of its familiar nomenclature, and invests it with a name, which ironically is a much truer naming than misnaming of the organization.

Mwireri wa Mukiraai also narrates the parable of the master and three servants, which becomes an ironic allegory of the state of Kenya under neocolonialism. Ngugi borrows this from Gospel of Matthew, and does not alter the plot or even the language of the parable. This is the story of a master who leaves his three servants with five, three and one talent, respectively. Ngugi changes this to varying amounts of money left to the servants. The first and the second put the money to work and are able to show the master rich dividends when he returns. The third buries his money in a hole and accuses the master of being hard and therefore justifies not having put his money to work. In Ngugi's version, the third servant accuses the master of being an imperialist and a capitalist and therefore defends his decision of not putting his money to work. The master is very angry to hear this and accuses the third servant of being influenced by communist propaganda. The master has him

arrested and punished and declares “For unto the man of property, more will be given, but from the poor man will be taken even the little that he has kept in reserve” (*Devil* 85). This is almost a direct quotation from chapter 24 of *Matthew*. What Ngugi is doing in the retelling of the parable of the three talents is that he is reading the language of the Bible literally. In the scriptural text, money is used as a metaphor for spirituality, Ngugi refuses that reading and rereads the parable taking the metaphors for their literal value, thus reinterpreting the parable through the lens of materialist history.

From the parable of the tree talents, which is an allegorical expose of neocolonial Kenya, we are transported to the competition among the thieves and robbers in the cave. Ngugi's strategy of the literalization of metaphor continues in this scene. Wariinga notes that the skin pallor of the foreign thieves is very red. Wangari points out to her that their leader had just declared that they believed in the democracy of eating flesh and drinking blood of workers. The foreign delegates are depicted as being actually red in a literalization of a metaphor of exploitation, “eating flesh and drinking blood.”

Ngugi's brilliant achievement in *Devil on the Cross* is the scene dramatizing the competition of modern thieves. This is a rhetorical contest and permits Ngugi the full use of his skills as a dramatist, which had already led to the writing and production of plays like *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *I will Marry When I Want*. The Competition begins with the speech or testimony the first contestant Gitutu wa Gataanguru. Ngugi introduces this character with the following physical description “Gitutu had a belly that protruded so far that it would have touched the ground had it

not been supported by the braces that held up his trousers”(*Devil* 99). After cataloguing his material assets like houses and cars, Gitutu also provides a catalog of the food he consumes through the day, emphasizing the huge quantities of milk and meats that are a part of his daily diet. Ngugi seems to be drawing on an old medieval tradition of the grotesque body, which has been studied exhaustively by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*. According to Bakhtin, in Rabelais and other medieval writers “In the oldest system of images food was related to work. . . .As the last victorious stage of work, the image of food often symbolized the entire labor process” (*Rabelais* 281). In Rabelais, food is presented in the context of feasting. Bakhtin points out that the banquet “is even more important as the occasion for wise discourse, the wise truth”(*Rabelais* 283). In Ngugi’s evocation of the grotesque, food is not physically present in the cave where the contest is taking place. There is no participatory, celebration of eating and drinking. However, food is catalogued by several of the speakers, and it is manifest in the corpulence of the bodies present. Food imagery in Ngugi, is thus symptomatic of the alienation of the community, from work, and from the fruits of their labor. The tradition of the wise speech is also inverted in Ngugi’s novel, because the speeches of the contestants, for all their rhetorical grandiosity, reveal moral decrepitude and sometimes border on the distinctly irrational.

After listing his food habits and possessions, including wives and mistresses, Gitutu following the rules of the competition, chronicles how he made his fortune. Gitutu’s special claim to recognition in the field of robbery lies in his prowess in land speculation. Exploiting the hunger for land of a landless peasantry, he buys land

cheaply, bribing bank officials for loans and then divides and sells individual plots for tremendous profit. After this success story, Gitutu, complying with the rules of the competition, ends with his proposal of even greater thievery, suggesting that air be trapped in special bottles and marketed as "Imported Air," for a huge profit. While this is eerily reminiscent of the commodification and branding of drinking water in today's global consumer market, the scene's literary lineage can be traced to Book III of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. In it Swift provides a devastating critique of the Royal Society, and the newly emerging discourse of scientific rationality, by satirizing the projectors whose various schemes for progress are profoundly irrational and out of touch with everyday reality.

The speaker after Gitutu, Kihaahu Wa Gatheca, has made his fortune through a scam in education. He deludes the public into believing that he has opened a school with European teachers and students and charges exorbitant fees, exploiting the public's obeisance to western culture. Kihaahu goes on to narrate his prowess in his political career. He uses a combination of bribery and terror to remove all opponents from the race. After winning the election through such means, he recuperates the money he has invested through his involvement in housing scams, similar to his predecessor, Gitutu's land scams. Murikaai is the third speaker in the conference, and he declares that he is supporter of only one kind of theft, "That is theft and robbery of nationals of a given country, who steal from their own people and consume and plunder right there, in the country itself" (*Devil* 166). He passionately opposes "the theft of foreign thieves and robbers who come to our country and build lairs here" (*Devil* 166). Murikaai is thus opposing globalization in favor of a nationalist closed

economy, with the creation of a native elite rather than a global corporate elite. Murikaai's proposal meets with vehement opposition, and in the course of the novel, Mwaura, the matatu driver is hired as an assassin to kill him, once again prophetically anticipating the death of most nationalistic oppositions to the spread of global capitalism.

Nditika wa Ngunji, the speaker to follow Murikaai, narrates his credentials as an expert in robbery in the field of gem smuggling. His proposal for the advancement of robbery and theft in the country is to start trading in human body parts like lungs, hearts and bellies. Alamin Mazrui and Lupenga Mphande in their essay "Orality and the Literature of Combat: The Legacy of Fanon" argue that "*Devil on the Cross* abandons the omnipotent narrator" and "uses orality to create a satiric world in which villains assert their own villainy. Ngugi transforms the narrative style of exaggeration to deliberately blur the boundary between reality and fantasy: a device he employs effectively in the cave scene shifting from the real to the unreal"(178). This rising crescendo of the horror of these proposals reaches a peak in the proposal of Kimeendeeri, which Wariinga witnesses in her dream:

Kimeendeeri intends to fence off the farm with barbed wire. . . .He plans to pen the workers in there like animals. He will then fix electrically operated machines to their bodies for milking their sweat or the energy that produces the sweat, their blood and their brains. The three commodities will then be exported to foreign countries to feed industries there (*Devil* 187).

This is one of the starkest images in the text, prophetic in the accuracy of its depiction of the sweatshop conditions of labor that have pervaded many parts of the world in the present time.

Ngugi also depicts the counter mobilization against this meeting of globalization's powerful elites by peasants, workers, and students. Wangari in the spirit of naïve optimism, tries to bring in the police to show them the real thieves. They end up arresting her, instead, accusing her of disrupting the stability of the country. Muturi rushes to bring in workers to the cave, so that they can see the crimes that are being planned and perpetrated against them. The stranger who had given Wariinga the invitation to the meeting, who turns out to be a student leader, also joins in the procession marching to the cave where the convention of thievery is being held. Seeing them, all the robbers and thieves flee. The procession enters the cave, and Muturi and the student leader are able to address the audience of workers and students, charting out their goals for a more just and egalitarian world. This is a brief celebratory moment, before armored police and military trucks come into the cave and break up the protest meeting, killing several workers and arresting many leaders. This dialectical progression of a meeting of world financial organizations, sparking off anti-globalization protests, followed by police repression, has been a recurrent trope in the anti-globalization movements in Seattle, Washington DC, Prague, to name a few locations. The backlash by repressive law and order agencies has been a predictable feature. What is so powerful about Ngugi's novel is that it was written in 1982, when such mobilizations had not got the international media's attention, or had even happened on such a large scale.

If Ngugi is indeed prophetic in anticipating a collective struggle against globalization, in the future, what is the vision of this struggle that he leaves us with. At least in, *Devil on the Cross*, the hopes of a collective struggle that are raised transiently, are quickly dissipated. The last movement in the novel depicts the individual careers of Gatuiria and Wariinga, the first as a musical artist searching for a musical form to express his nation's history and the other is Wariinga's quest to reinvent herself as a new woman. This last quest ends tragically, and the novel ending with the dissolution of the hope of fulfillment of Wariinga and Gaturia's relationship also seems to undergo a metamorphosis in form, at least to the extent this novel borrows from European genres, from that of a Menippean Satire to Tragedy.

Gatuiria, the musician and intellectual, is in many ways an alter ego for Ngugi himself and his reflections about the challenges of composing African music are self-reflexive passages offering us an insight into Ngugi's own theories of literary composition, at a time when his own writing is making a transition, from English into Gikuyu. This is not just a transition from any language into another. It is a transition from English, the language of his liberal education to Gikuyu, which is primarily an oral language. In fact, with *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi is creating the first written novel in Gikuyu, a decision springing from his increasing frustration with the inaccessibility of his creative work to most Africans.

Gatuiria, like Ngugi is searching for a form and a cultural tradition, from which to develop his own creative work:

Our stories, our riddles, our songs, our customs, our traditions, everything about our national heritage has been lost to us.

Who can play the gicaandi for us today and read and interpret verses written on the gourd? (*Devil* 59).

Gitahi Gititi in the essay “Recuperating a Disappearing Art Form: Resonances of Gicaandi in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*,” mentions “Like his not so fictional creation Gaturia, Ngugi is engaged in a search for suitable containers and conveyors of various facets of individual African cultures—literature, philosophy, technology, politics, musicology and so on.”(117). In his quest to recuperate and preserve the art of the gicaandi, Ngugi frames the entire narrative in the form of a performance by a gicaandi player. Gititi mentions “the narrative burden in *Devil on the Cross* is carried by the Prophet of Justice who is simultaneously/ interchangeably the Gicaandi player” (118). Gititi informs us that the gicaandi instrument is made from a gourd, and that seeds of the gourd have to be saved in times of drought. Gititi argues that “Gicaandi is ultimately about self- generation and continuity: the storing of the seed for future planting involves a selection of the best”(123). It is significant that in the musical composition that Gaturia creates in the end, fulfilling his long quest to achieve a national musical form that will create “harmony in polyphony,” the gicaandi is prominently featured.

It is also significant that during his quest for a musical form, Gaturia receives inspiration from the stories told to him by an old man from Bahati. These three tales are all fables, featuring maidens and ogres. They all demonstrate oppression and a successful overthrow of the oppressor. The oral beast fable is not just an inspiration for the thematic content of Gaturia's musical composition, but it is also at the heart of Ngugi's own project as a novelist. Alamin Mazrui and Lupenga Mphande compare

Ngugi's role as a writer and an intellectual to that of a griot. A griot is a "teller of tales and a chronicler of the peoples' history"(Mazrui and Mphande 176). These critics consider Ngugi to be a new griot who "reclaims oral tradition and liberates it from its traditional passive use as a vehicle for authentication and passing messages from generation to generation"(Mazrui and Mpphande 179). The growth into maturity of Gaturia's polyphonic musical aesthetic, stands in the novel, in many ways for Ngugi own experiment at writing a pioneering novel in Gikuyu and producing a hybrid genre fusing European novelistic traditions with the Gikuyu oral traditions of the beast fable and the gicaandi.

The last section of *Devil on the Cross* depicts the transformation of Wariinga into a self-reliant modern woman. At the time of the destruction of the collective movement against globalization, Wariinga has a dream in the tradition of a medieval English morality play in which a voice tempts her to sell her soul and turn to prostitution. She rejects that offer and proceeds instead to become a mechanic. She is able to become successful in this field and even subvert the patriarchal assumptions of her clients and c-workers. James Ogude has pointed out that in his portrayal of Wariinga, Ngugi naively assumes that the problems of gender stereotypes can be solved by women assuming expressly masculine roles. The fact that Wariinga's individual act of assuming a role, which is a masculine one traditionally, is not enough is borne out in the narrative logic of the novel. Wariinga enters into a fulfilling relationship with the musician Gaturia, and they decide to marry each other. When they arrive at Gaturia's parents' house Wariinga is shocked to realize that Gaturia's father is none other than the Rich Old Man, who used to play the predatory

game of the hunter and the hunted with her and who is the father of her daughter Wambui. This is an irony of fate, reminiscent of Sophoclean tragedy, with its incestuous overtones. All the courage and perseverance that Wariinga has invested in recreating her life is ruined when her past catches up with her, casting even her present relationship with Gaturia in an incestuous light, as Gaturia and her daughter share the same father. At that moment, she reverses the pattern of the game of the hunter and the hunted and shoots Gaturia's father, the man who has been her oppressor, from her girlhood.

Devil on the Cross thus ends on a distinctly tragic note. What is the significance of tragedy for a writer who is committed to the idea of revolution in literature? Raymond Williams in his book *Modern Tragedy* has traced the prevailing relationship between tragedy and social movements:

The most influential kinds of explicitly social thinking have often rejected tragedy as in itself defeatist. Against what they have known as the idea of tragedy, they have stressed man's powers to change his condition and to end a major part of suffering which the tragic ideology seems to ratify. The idea of tragedy, that is to say, has been explicitly opposed by the idea of revolution: there has been as much confidence on the one side as on the other (63).

Williams posits that the appropriate genre for the successful revolution is not tragedy, but epic, in which the memory of the suffering of a social group is remembered and honored. Therefore, the epic can only be written in a post-revolutionary moment.

However, the moment of revolution is a time of chaos and suffering, and seen in this way, revolution is not antithetical to tragedy. Williams is deeply critical of the prevailing mood of pacifism, and fear of war and revolution, which characterized the post World War II period in which he was writing. He insists “we have identified war and revolution as tragic dangers, when the real tragic danger underlying war and revolution, is a disorder we continually enact”(81). Viewing the relationship of tragedy to contemporary revolution in these terms, for Williams, the aesthetic project can be defined as “the only consciousness that seems adequate in our world is then an exposure to the actual disorder”(81). I believe that this is precisely what Ngugi is attempting at end of *Devil on the Cross*. However, Ngugi's vision of revolution does not stop with an image of an individual's act of violence against the injustice of the system. In his last novel *Matigari*, Ngugi reiterates his belief in a collective armed struggle.

Although a full discussion of *Matigari*, is beyond the scope of this chapter, I would like to focus on it briefly. *Matigari*, which translated from Gikuyu means “patriots who survived the bullets,” is the name of a mythical figure who returns to post-independent Kenya, after defeating Settler Williams, during his long campaign in the forest. He returns to claim Settler Williams’ house, which was built by the sweat of Matigari and his family of workers. He is shocked to realize that the house is still occupied by the descendants of Williams and Boy. When he attempts to reclaim the house, he is arrested. After a confrontation with the Minister of Peace and Justice, Matigari is thrown into a mental institution. In his final attempt to reclaim the house, when the police are in his pursuit, he sets the house on fire. At the end of the novel,

Muriuki, the young boy who along with Guthera, a prostitute, had been Matigari's abiding companion, unearths Matigari's possessions, from under a tree. Muriuki arms himself with Matigari's AK47, and the novel ends with Muriuki hearing the voices of peasants, students and patriots chanting, "Victory shall be ours." The novel thus ends with Muriuki pledging to dedicate himself to the struggle begun by Matigari, with a reiteration of the belief earlier proclaimed by Matigari that "Justice for the oppressed comes from a sharpened spear" (*Matigari* 131). Matigari had come to the realization that "one could not defeat the enemy with words alone. One had to have the right words but these words had to be strengthened by the force of arms" (131). Ngugi seems to be echoing Frantz Fanon's views on violence in *Matigari*. In the chapter "Concerning Violence," in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that violence is endemic to the colonial situation, and so decolonization must come out of violence. Fanon sees violence as a positive and liberating force:

At the level of individuals violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect . . . When the people have taken violent part in the national liberation they will allow no one to set themselves up as "liberators." They show themselves to be jealous of the results of their action and take good care not to place their future, their destiny, or the fate of their country in the hands of a living god (*The Wretched of the Earth* 94).

Although Fanon is astute in analyzing the emerging pattern of neocolonialism, he cannot really anticipate the transformation of the world, at the end of the Cold War in

the late twentieth century into an economy dominated by transnational corporations, operating under a regime of neoliberalism. Fanon's prediction that capital will remain locked and frozen in Europe because of its refusal to invest in decolonized countries and therefore sink capitalism into a state of crisis, has certainly not materialized. If anything, capitalism has charted out new and ingenious ways of survival, perpetuating economic disparities in the globe.

Globalization has also ushered in new regimes of violence. Some of these conditions like conditions of sweatshop labor, brutal repression of any attempt at organizing labor, police brutality against protest movements demonstrate newer mutations of violence that are somewhat distanced from Fanon's theoretical assumptions. However the question of the role of violence in a movement against globalization has not lost its relevance. Hannah Arendt in her essay "Reflections on Violence" provides a careful and nuanced critique of some of Fanon's ideas, while expressing her admiration for many of his tenets. Arendt distinguishes violence and power, throughout her argument.

Violence, we must remember, does not depend on numbers or opinion, but on implements, and the implements of violence share with all other tools that they increase and multiply human strength . . . Violence can always destroy power out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What can never grow out of it is power" (61).

Arendt argues that Gandhian non-violence was effective against the British colonial state precisely because its rule was based on power, which originates from consensus. Arendt would thus argue that a successful mobilization against any regime, would depend on changing the power equation. However, she concedes that rage and violence are sometimes the only appropriate ways to react when our sense of justice is deeply offended. For a movement to become revolutionary, the power behind the structure of authority and violence that it opposes has to disintegrate. For a New Internationalist movement to succeed, the consensus that a neoliberal ideology is the only alternative has to be consistently undermined. Ngugi's novels remain powerful expressions of a commitment to a revolutionary ideology. While not every aspect of the struggle against globalization has been as carefully thought out or articulated, as one may have hoped, in anticipating globalization and in imagining and expressing a consistent rejection of its central tenets, Ngugi is already furthering the new internationalist project. Finally in refashioning the novel, and recreating a new public for it, Ngugi is successful in interweaving his aesthetic goals with his political ones.

Ngugi has commented on his attempt to develop a new aesthetic of the novel on several occasions. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi describes the use of orature in *Devil on the Cross* as “the appropriation of the novel into the oral tradition”(83). He describes the novel as being structured by “the age old tradition of storytelling around the fireside” emphasizing “the group reception of art” (83). In *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams* Ngugi draws attention to the performative aspects of *Devil on the Cross* and their origins in orature:

There is a constant interaction between the fictional audience and the performing artists of modern theft and robbery. Not surprisingly, *Devil on the Cross* has been converted into theater many times in different parts of Africa. The actual narrative unfolds through songs and dramatic settings, and with many of the events orally transmitted. Thus many art forms and genres are utilized in the novel. Repetition of certain motifs is another feature of the narrative, and I borrowed this from the oral narrative (124).

Although *Devil on the Cross* draws extensively on conventions of African orature, particularly in its use of the gicaandi player as a framing device for the group reception of the novel, I have tried to draw attention to its simultaneous use of European literary conventions, the genres of the parable, Menippean satire and tragedy, which are harnessed to create a hybrid aesthetic form. Even though Ngugi has expressed his skepticism about the prevalent celebration of hybridity, and seems to privilege a reclaiming of authentic African art forms, in the actual practice of his novelistic craft, there is no exclusive adherence to one tradition. In his fictional representations and non-fictional reflections on the postcolonial intellectual, Ngugi seems to privilege intellectual activism in the form of pedagogical reform, the writing of alternate histories, the reclaiming of lost art forms, and the tasks of mobilizing and organizing labor. Most of these specific projects are located within the national borders of postcolonial Kenya, even when the organizing efforts are against international financial organizations. This contradicts with Ngugi's autobiographical

situation as an exile in the US. However in his aesthetic practices, there is a greater fluidity of nationalist and diasporic artistic conventions utilized strategically to pursue his political goal of critiquing the workings of imperialism in an aesthetic form.

**Epilogue: The Aesthetics of Hybridity and The Postcolonial Novel:
Crossing Borders of Nation and Diaspora**

I began my study of the postcolonial novel by attempting to find an alternative to the impasse created by the incommensurable positions of Postmodern and Marxist theorists on the question of postcolonial intellectual migrancy. I chose to study the postcolonial novel produced by four writers from South Asia and Africa to examine in their working with the form of the novel, the complex relationship between the novelistic form and postcolonial politics. While mapping the intellectual and aesthetic legacies of the postcolonial novel, I have argued that the postcolonial novel inherits two literary traditions that of European modernism and the anti-colonial writings produced during decolonization movements.

As a consequence of this dual literary lineage, the novels I study display a variety of responses to the issue of autonomy of the literary /artistic sphere on the one hand, and involvement with political events on the other. In this concluding section of my dissertation, I trace some of the complex inter-relationships between the novel and events in the postcolonial public sphere, which have informed my study. I argue that the postcolonial novelists that I study offer powerful critiques of multiple issues facing the national and diasporic communities they engage with in their novels. The form of the novel enables them to allow a complex representation of these realities in a manner which destabilizes many of the binaries of hegemonic discourse like First world/ third world, tradition/ modernity, oppression/ liberation which are often constructed around divisions of geographic and cultural spaces. Through out my

project, I have drawn on current theories of transnational feminism to facilitate readings of these novels, and continuously interrogate and deconstruct these binaries.

I also argue in this section that the double literary lineage of the postcolonial novel produces the hybrid aesthetic of the postcolonial novel. I examine different understandings of the term “hybridity” and argue that in the postcolonial novel hybridity is not only a strategy of aesthetic innovation but that it is political strategy to continue the work against new mutations of cultural imperialism ushered in by an era of global capitalism.

By privileging the study of the postcolonial novel and reading the works of these writers as adversarial to hegemonic systems, I do not wish to erase or marginalize the political movements in decolonized nations and metropolitan centers that continue the urgent work of mobilizing public opinion, and campaigning against corporate globalization, forms of neocolonialism, and religious orthodoxies which impinge on the rights of women. I have sought to maintain in my study that the postcolonial novels are never divorced from events in the public sphere of the metropolis and the ex-colony. The influence of literary intellectuals may be limited to their reading publics, and in the context of limited access to literacy in many decolonized nations as well as limited access to the English language, in these places, the postcolonial novel may be somewhat limited as a mode of intellectual intervention. These novels cannot substitute for the work of activists fighting for the rights of people in the Narmada Valley, under threat of displacement and ecological devastation by the impending construction of a World Bank funded dam project, nor those who are continuing to seek justice for the victims of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy

by attempting to legally prosecute the Union Carbide Company. My goal in this project has not been to enter once more into the theory versus activism debate, or place these spheres of activity in a hierarchical structure of importance or value. My attempt in this project has been to try to move beyond these binarisms, of theory and activism.

While it is not my intention to relegate activism to the margins by focusing on literary productions of the postcolonial world, I do want to argue that the other extreme position that postcolonial theory and literature reduce resistance to textual hybridity, and are thus implicated in a strategy of political containment is equally untenable. My choice of novelists is premised on the blurring of the boundaries of the literary and the public spheres in their literary careers. Salman Rushdie and Ngugi wa Thiong'o are striking examples of novelists whose works have become intertwined with issues of free speech, censorship, religious orthodoxies and political repression in postcolonial Kenya, South Asia. and the South Asian diaspora in Thatcherite Britain. Gayatri Spivak has studied the complex interplay of the textual politics of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* with the political events of the Shah Bano case and the passage of the controversial Muslim Women's Bill in the Indian Parliament, by the Rajiv Gandhi government, which was the also the first government to ban the novel. Spivak juxtaposes the textual content of the novel *The Satanic Verses* with the religious fundamentalisms in India, the Islamic orthodoxy in Iran and its pronouncement of the death edict, as well as the book burnings in Bradford, England. The Rushdie Affair, which I studied in the chapter on Rushdie demonstrated the violent conjunction of public events with the textual content of a postcolonial novel.

In the career of Ngugi too, literary events in the plot of *Matigari* parallel events in the life of Ngugi. In his preface to the English edition of *Matigari*, Ngugi recounts that this novel was written during his exile in London after his imprisonment in Kenya. This novel, according to Ngugi, has had several “prophetic moments.” *Matigari* the fictional hero of his novel was “resurrected for a short time in Kenya in 1987, when intelligence reports were circulating that a man called Matigari was roaming the countryside, demanding justice. Ngugi narrates the events surrounding this incident with a touch of pathos and irony:

There were orders for his immediate arrest but the police discovered that Matigari was only a fictional character in a book of the same name. In February 1987, the police raided all the bookshops and seized every copy of the novel. *Matigari* the fictional hero, and the novel, his only habitation, have been effectively banned in Kenya. With the publication of this English edition, they have joined their author in exile (viii).

This episode narrated by Ngugi demonstrates effectively that the postcolonial novel and events in the public sphere are vitally connected. *Matigari*, the novel, is certainly an imaginative representation of postcolonial Kenyan realities, a novelistic rendition of the history of the armed Mau Mau struggle, and a call to the present generation of Kenyans to reclaim that radical history. So in its attempt to give an imaginative form to the crisis of neocolonial Kenya, it is already vitally connected to Kenyan realities. However, the character of the revolutionary Matigari is not an allegorical or symbolic representation of any single radical individual. This is the categorical error committed

by the Kenyan intelligence officials. They are unable to distinguish the imaginative representation of a rebel with the actual existence of one. Paranoid and trained only in the art of containing protest and rebellion, their actions of trying to capture Matigari are based on an inadequate understanding of the place of literature in society. They do succeed in destroying the physical copies of the novel, but can they control the series of imaginative actions that the text was able to produce, the rumor of an actual character called Matigari that it aroused in the Kenyan national psyche. These anecdotal reminiscences of Ngugi prove that postcolonial novels not only draw from events in the public sphere but they also set into motion and inspire events in the public sphere as well. Thus it would be erroneous to declare that their representations of resistance in these novels are limited only to literary aesthetic strategies which do not extend to the sphere of political action and change. The Matigari events even complicate my earlier formulation that the postcolonial novelist is limited to a small audience because of limited access to literacy and print culture, and therefore these novels may have limited impact in the public sphere. The events surrounding *Matigari* prove on the other hand that even when literary texts are not widely read, they have the power to stir the imagination of a society and influence events in political life.

Azade Seyhan in her comparative study of immigrant writers in the US, and the writings of Turkish immigrants in Germany has reflected on the value of literature for diasporic communities as an alternative archive of communal memory, counterpoised against multiple erasures in official historiographies of immigration. In *Writing Outside the Nation*, Seyhan argues:

Literature tends to record what history and public memory often forget. Furthermore it can narrate both obliquely and allegorically, thereby preserving what can be censored and encouraging interpretation and commentary in the public sphere. Through the lens of personal recollection and interpretation, the specificity of class, ethnic and gender experiences gains a stature that is often erased, forgotten or ignored in the larger management of public memory (12).

My study of the migrant postcolonial novel is attentive to the form of the novel as an alternative repository of national and diasporic memories. While I agree with Seyhan's argument that literature because of its oblique and indirect nature of representation can initiate debates in the public sphere, even under conditions of censorship, I do not believe that the preferred form for this is the allegory. In fact I have tried to demonstrate in my readings of the selected postcolonial novels that the complex relationships these novels share with postcolonial realities defies the one to one precise correspondences established through allegorical signification.

Not only does the postcolonial migrant novel provide an alternative to official historiography, but it also provides a crucial third space between the poles of the decolonized nation and the diasporic community of the metropolis. For migrant writers, who are in relationship of dual and simultaneous belonging to both these spaces, the literary forms they work with posits a crucial third space of cultural negotiation. Almost all the novelists I have studied show through the complex oscillation between the metropolis and the ex-colony in the material of their novels, that they do not privilege their countries of origin or their adopted countries. Like the

writers studied by Seyhan, the novelists I examine “express the sentiment that neither a return to the homeland left behind nor being at home in the host country is an option. They need an alternative space, a third geography. This is the space of memory, of language, of translation”(15).

As a result of inhabiting through their fictional works, an alternative third space of language and memory, the novelists I study are able to offer powerful critiques of postcolonial realities within decolonized nations and within immigrant communities in metropolitan locations. Due to their personal intimacy with the political landscapes of South Asia or Africa, from where their migrant journeys began and with the locations in Britain or US where they ended, these novelists through the intimate association with their dual cultural legacies are able to reveal the unraveling, in their novels, of many predictable binaries, which emerge from a geographical and cultural division of the world: first world third world, West- East, North-South, Developed-Underdeveloped, Modernity and Tradition and so forth.

In reading these novels written by four postcolonial migrant writers, two men and two women, two from South Asia and two from Africa, I have noted the fragility of these geographic and cultural binarisms. In undoing these binarisms, I have been indebted to the methodologies of transnational or multicultural feminism. Ella Shohat in the introduction to *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age* has argued for the need of a “polycentric relationality” in feminist discourse. In defining multicultural feminism Shohat writes, “It does not exalt one political concern (feminism) over another (multiculturalism); rather, it highlights and reinforces the mutual embeddedness between the two” (1). Shohat highlights the fact that by tying

these two terms, multicultural and feminism, *Talking Visions* refuses to arrange class, race, nation, gender, in a hierarchy, but she emphasizes the “political intersectionality” of these “axes of stratification.” Later in the essay Shohat elaborates on the agenda of multicultural feminism by charting its goals:

It attempts to remap the shape shifting modalities of oppression and empowerment recognizing that ‘oppression’ and ‘empowerment’ are relational terms. Individuals can occupy more than one position, being empowered on one axis, (class, say) but not on another (such as sexuality). Instead of a simple oppressor/oppressed dichotomy we find a wide spectrum of power relations among and within communities (*Talking Visions* 4).

Related to the oppressor/ oppressed binary, one of the principal binaries that multicultural feminism attempts to deconstruct is the opposition between tradition and modernity. This is usually a legacy of colonialism, but it has also become tied to hegemonic Euro-American feminism which casts postcolonial women as victims, of oppressive ‘tradition,’ which needs to be shed to enter into the narrative of modernization and liberation. In my study of postcolonial novels, such examples of oppressive tradition in the lives of postcolonial women range from the practice of *purdah* or veiling in Salman Rushdie's depiction of Muslim women in *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses* to the practice of polygamy in Emecheta's depiction of tribal Ibo life in *The Joys of Motherhood*.

I have attempted to read these instances in the lives of the female characters through the lens of multicultural feminism in a relational manner. I have thus been

attentive to the postcolonial migrant novelists' sensitivity in depicting these oppressions on women in a relational manner. While Rushdie is unequivocal in his critique of *purdah* in Islamic society, he does not posit Britain as a site where all oppressions on women, particularly those inflicted on their bodies, end. A woman in Thatcherite Britain is shown to be just as vulnerable to the patriarchal desire to control and police female sexuality.

In a parallel vein, Emecheta's heroines in Britain are subject to the benevolent patriarchy of the modern industrial welfare state, which while ostensibly protecting them from domestic violence, polices their personal and sexual lives, parenting abilities, as well as perpetuates a vicious cycle of poverty and dependence. Emecheta is equally critical of traditional Ibo patriarchy in which women are valued only for their reproductive potential, and are subjected to hostility and neglect if they are infertile. Bapsi Sidhwa's fiction also highlights the notions of normative womanhood which are privileged in the emerging new nation in the process of decolonization, as well as the model woman who is a pivotal element in the creation of the model immigrant minority in the US. The category of gender thus destabilizes any assumed superiority of capitalist modernity over pre-capitalist tradition. This is not to suggest that women in all spaces, metropolitan and decolonized locations experience identical oppressions. These novels demonstrate the particular mutations that take place in gender relations, as evident in Ngugi's powerful representation of the advent of capitalist modernity and the manner in which it alters the fabric of social relationships in *Petals of Blood*. A similar trajectory of changes emanating from tribal society's contact with capitalist modernity is evident in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*.

With regard to the response of novelists I study to the issue of autonomy versus political commitment debate that I examined in the Introduction there is a diversity of positions. Different practitioners of postcolonial novel have fashioned themselves differently with respect to the whole question of their art and its relationship to politics. Among the four novelists that I studied in the previous chapters, Salman Rushdie in his novels and his autobiographical writing most passionately advocates for a position close to the Frankfurt School's notion of the autonomy of art. Although deeply intertwined with the political history of South Asia and the South Asian diaspora in Britain, Rushdie's novels ultimately privilege the logic of the form of the literary work in gesturing or instigating social change indirectly, rather than subscribing to the notion of the artist or writer being a political or social activist. On the opposite end of the spectrum, I examined the work of the Kenyan novelist Ngugi, whose work both fiction and non-fiction is dedicated to the cause of resisting imperialism and neocolonialism.

In the fiction of the two women writers, Bapsi Sidhwa and Buchi Emecheta, there is a range of aesthetic and political choices expressed by these writers. While both deal with issues like war and violence on women, as well as the impact of immigration on women, there are varying degrees of engagement with the project of feminism, or representing a vision of gender equality which is broad based and socially progressive. While Sidhwa's fiction in a realist mode documents some of the contradictions of bourgeois nationalism, or the immigrant dream of social mobility, Emecheta's fiction is often more polemical in advocating for rights of poor women on welfare in Britain.

Although differentiated by their individual political and aesthetic engagements, all four novelists are attempting in varied ways to forge a hybrid aesthetic of the postcolonial novel. My use of the term "hybrid" draws from Mikhail Bakhtin's use of the term in his discussion of the form of the novel in *The Dialogic Imagination*. Bakhtin believed that the novel from its origin incorporated multiple languages of heteroglossia and the novel arose from a fusion of various forms, drama, journalism etc. Susan Stanford Friedman in her book *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* has traced an intellectual lineage for the contemporary use of hybridity. In tracing the linguistic origins of hybridity, Friedman draws on the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and highlights Bakhtin's distinction between "organic" and "intentional" hybridity. Friedman elaborates on this distinction drawn by Bakhtin by explaining organic hybridity as "the melding of differences that occurs without conscious effort, as part of ongoing cultural evolution"(86). On the other hand, Bakhtin's concept of "intentional hybridity" is characterized according to Friedman by "a conscious production of linguistic mixtures, especially in aesthetic artifacts" (86). In the postcolonial novels that I have studied, there are examples of both organic and intentional instances of novelistic hybridity as distinguished by Bakhtin. I consider the postcolonial novel to be a hybrid genre not only because that is the innate propensity of the novelistic form but because the postcolonial novel is located at the crossroads of two literary traditions, that of the European novel and that of narrative traditions which are indigenous to the countries from where these novels originate, at least imaginatively. These narrative traditions

range from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat* epic traditions in India to the conventions of gicandi singer or African orature in the case of Ngugi.

The most dramatic results of the fusion of the European and the native traditions are seen in the works of Rushdie and Ngugi. Among the novelists I study, Rushdie has been most explicit in declaring his allegiance to the aesthetic of hybridity. In his essay "In Good Faith" anthologized in *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie puts forth his artistic manifesto:

The Satanic Verses celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is a great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is change-by fusion, change- by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves (394).

Rushdie is on the one hand self-consciously modeling himself as a modernist writer in exile like Joyce, and his fiction is indeed steeped with references to the European literary canon. However, Rushdie simultaneously draws on a wealth of popular cultural material from the Indian sub-continent and Hindi films are a staple repository for his linguistic effervescence and puns. This spillage of bicultural references is often obfuscatory. I think Rushdie is at one level playing on Dipesh Chakrabarty's notion of "asymmetrical ignorance." Chakrabarty in his essay

“Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History” has argued that while historians of South Asia are expected to be familiar with all aspects of European history, the same expectation or standard of knowledge is not expected of their European counterparts studying South Asian history. If a large section of Rushdie's readership is western, and with limited or non-existent access to South Asian languages and popular culture, what is Rushdie's purpose in fashioning a postcolonial novel that self-consciously mixes European high culture with aspects of South Asian history, narrative traditions, and popular culture? I consider Rushdie's aesthetic of hybridity to have an epistemological ambition of destabilizing hierarchies of knowledge. In this sense his aesthetic of hybridity has a deeply political significance although he himself has expressed a preference for autonomous art which is not overtly committed to any political agenda.

Ngugi's experience of a hybrid aesthetic is not as “intentional” in the Bakhtinian sense as Rushdie's. In fact it seems to have taken shape against his stated political purposes. After *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi stopped writing novels in English, and went on to write the first novel in his native Gikuyu. However, he has translated some of these Gikuyu novels to English himself. In reading the English version of the original Gikuyu novel, it becomes obvious that Ngugi cannot stop the hybrid fusion of European and African novelistic conventions even though he is overtly committed to destabilizing the hegemony of the English language by creating a novel in Gikuyu.

How does hybridity emerge in novels that are not so formally innovative? Bapsi Sidhwa is not attempting to create a new postcolonial aesthetic by the blending of western and indigenous traditions. However in a novel like *Cracking India*, the

contemporary historical, journalistic, and popular memories of Partition become shaped into the narrative fabric. In order to understand Sidhwa's particular mode of hybridity, it is useful to bring in Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia in *The Dialogic Imagination* as opposed to a "unitary language" of other genres. Bakhtin defines the novels as "a diversity of speech types (sometimes even a diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices artistically organized"(262). Bakhtin juxtaposes the unifying centralizing forces that evolved in poetic genres with decentralizing, centrifugal forces impulses of languages in the novel. Bakhtin locates the genealogy of the novel in low life art forms:

On the lower levels, on the stages of local fairs and at buffoon spectacles . . . there developed the literature of the *fabliaux* and *Schwanke* of street songs, folksayings, anecdotes where there was no language center at all . . . where all 'languages' were masks and where no language could claim to be an authentic, incontestable face (*Dialogic Imagination* 273).

Bakhtin argues that these low genres comprised of what he calls "heteroglossia," and it these multiple languages represented in the low genres of heteroglossia that go on to evolve into the dialogic form of the novel. For Bakhtin, heteroglossia existed in opposition to literary language. He characterizes heteroglossia as "parodic, aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time"(273).

Bapsi Sidhwa's novels can be read as expressions of multiple languages of heteroglossia entering into the discourse of the novel to challenge the language of

official nationalist history. In *Cracking India*, the plot oscillates between the interiors of the bourgeois Sethi household and Lahore's Queen's Garden. Around the character of Ayah, cohere a variegated group of low-life characters, including Ice Candy Man and Masseur, representative of a variety of religions and drawn mainly from the working class strata of society. The crowd in *Cracking India*, before it dispersed in the tumult of the Partition riots represents a real alternative to the world of elite politics. Through the unfolding drama of the decolonization and new nationhood, the crowd is able to offer a satiric and critical perspective on the workings of bourgeois nationalism. The crowd is often located in the open air Queen's Park at Lahore and is more inclusive of the languages of heteroglossia than in the monologic political discourse circulating indoors, in the space of the Sethi household. Sidhwa's novel can be thought of an example of "organic" hybridity, in which the dominant narrative of nationalism is constantly parodied by the introduction of multiple critiques of nationalism by women, religious minorities, low caste untouchables, and other displaced groups, which subvert any triumphalist interpretation of decolonization.

In a similar manner in Buchi Emecheta's novels, the experiences of immigrant women, which might have been collected in Welfare offices by social workers become documented in the autobiographical London novels. Emecheta creates in these novels an alternative archive of the memories of the racist policies of British immigration. In the absence of her novels, there would be very little documentation of the housing crisis, the racism and poverty faced by immigrants from former colonies.

Even though, Emecheta's aesthetic appears to be lacking in formal innovation, Cynthia Ward has pointed out that she employs elements from African orality along

with the elements of the world of literacy to which she has been exposed to ever since her first encounter with the colonial educational system. Therefore I also consider her fiction to be deploying a hybrid aesthetic in which the languages of her African tribal heritage throw into question and problematize the language of western individualism. These languages of tradition and modernity, individual and society, exist in a tense relationship in a novel such as *The Joys of Motherhood*. The hybrid form of the postcolonial novel allows for the existence of these multiple languages and the ideologies they are implicated in without the creation of any easy resolution or privileging of one belief system over the other.

The group of novelists I study thus embody a range of choices in terms of their practice of novel writing. My study of this group of postcolonial novelists debunks the idea of the global literary market privileging one particular style of fiction. The novelists I study represent a range of commercial and popular success as well as a range of success in terms of novelistic innovation. While all the novelists I study have been successful in the literary marketplace, there is again a range in the amount of fame, popularity and academic recognition that has accrued to each. The multiplicity of literary styles in these novels, as well as the range of themes, that I have tried to highlight, would make it difficult to sustain a theory that the postcolonial novel expresses any singular aesthetic or that it is invested in any one area of intellectual exploration.

The multiplicity of literary styles, subject material and critical perspectives that have emerged in my study of these postcolonial novelists demolishes the possibility that as modes of intellectual intervention, postcolonial novels are

symptomatic of either a postmodern celebration of intellectual migrancy or a Marxist negation of adversarial migrancy, in a world under the sway of global capital. I have tried to map the myriad potentialities inherent in the form of the novel, its successful articulations of critiques of national and diasporic realities, as well as its erasures, silences and the limits of these possibilities. While not affirming every example of the postcolonial novel that I have studied, I have tried to appreciate the propensity of this genre to be in conversation with the world beyond the text.

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