

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

I am not especially inclined to comment on an “afterword” that was itself already a retrospective postscript. Narcissism has its limits, at least technically, and I have trouble seeing myself at the third degree glossing myself glossing.

--Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* 155

In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the four-generation da Gama-Zogoiby family span the whole twentieth century. To put it briefly, the family spend the first half of the century living in the struggles between nationalism and colonialism, and then spend the second half living in the sociopolitical turbulences brought about by communalism and ultranationalism. “Much of the religious strife India suffers today”, as Idris supposes, “is a result of the British divide-and-rule policy that lasted for more than a century” (160). Therefore, the whole narrative can be conveniently hailed as a novel coping with colonial and post-colonial issues.

These colonial and post-colonial experiences and problems are bound to be encountered in the liminal space that I have been discussing throughout the thesis. In addition, it must be remembered that Rushdie writes in this liminal space as well. He is certainly aware of the fact:

Indian writers in England have access to a second tradition, quite apart from their own racial history. It is the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group. We can quite legitimately claim as our ancestors the Huguenots, the Irish, the Jews; the past to which we belong is an English past, the history of immigrant Britain. Swift, Conrad, Marx are as much our literary forebears as Tagore or Ram Mohan Roy. America, a nation of immigrants, has created great literature out of the phenomenon of cultural transplantation, out of examining the ways in which people cope with a new world. (*IM* 20)

It is no doubt that Rushdie takes an optimistic view of the in-between situation of Indian writer in England or in English. Indeed, the experiences derived from the in-between space render Rushdie's oeuvres quite unique. Nonetheless, Pathak finds out a "besetting problem that the Indian novelist in English has to face pertains to the medium of expression" (15). And also, "[i]t has been pointed out repeatedly that a really excellent creative literature can be produced only in one's mother tongue" (15). Seemingly, Rushdie does not have problems as such. His use of the English language is so profound that one must have a literary ear to appreciate it. Languages, instead, are Rushdie's useful instruments in writing; he also makes use of languages as a writing strategy. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the conversations between the characters are devised by Rushdie in order for them to speak a not-quite-English. Apart from that, Rushdie inserts native languages and colloquialisms into the conversations. The admixture of languages would form a metonymic gap that accentuates differences, native cultures and languages.

Although Rushdie uses history as the background of many of his novels, also including *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the novel, however, should not be regarded as a historical novel in a strict sense. If one takes Rushdie to task for misusing history in the novel, then s/he must mistake it for a historical novel. As Pathak indicates:

Rushdie evinces a mature historical sense. The historical sense, T. S. Eliot remarks, "involves a perception, not only of the past, but of its presence." This consciousness of history, he adds, is "a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together," making a person genuinely "conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity. (Pathak, "*History*" 126-27)

As Rushdie maneuvers in and out the past in the narrative, the boundaries between the past and the present have been blurred. This is Rushdie's anachronistic strategy, different from the anachronism represented by Don Quixote. He alludes to Don Quixote many times in the narrative probably because he is drawing the readers' attention to his personal devisal of anachronism. Rajan further expounds Rushdie's appropriation of history:

Rushdie . . . blithely alters the date of Gandhi's death. . . . The correct date would not have affected Rushdie's fiction. He makes an issue of his right to be wrong simply to remind us that chronological accuracy is not the most important responsibility of a writer. (126)

Within the liminal space, which is ambivalent and hybrid, Rushdie takes advantage of his in-between identity and dynamic spatiotemporal axis to complicate his oeuvres and enrich the post-colonial corpus of meanings.

Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* not merely tells a family story but also

depicts a post-colonial society. This society is expressly located in India that has since long gone through diverse experiences of colonial intrusions and cultural impacts. The history of India, accordingly, gets to be a complex one in which transcultural activities and reciprocal influences among different cultures increasingly complicate and extend the nexus of cultures. The contact zone of different cultures is undoubtedly an in-between space where cultures meet, clash, and negotiate. The emotions and experiences derived from in-between struggles almost permeate most of Rushdie's works. This is why Bhabha's idea of 'liminal space' may well be conducive to a deeper understanding of Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

The idea of 'liminal space' or 'liminality' is an umbrella term that always goes hand in hand with some other ideas in post-colonial theory. Basically, it refers to an interstitial space or in-between space where cultural changes occur. Also, Bhabha begins *The Location of Culture* with a prefatory elaboration on the idea of liminal space, for he subsumes some other ideas under liminality, such as hybridity, cultural difference, and nationness. Liminality could be seen as each of these ideas writ large in post-colonial theory. The nature of the three liminality-specific ideas coincides with the way Rushdie fabricates the story of Da Gama-Zogoiby family, so the previous chapters are intended to evaluate *The Moor's Last Sigh* by associating liminal space with the three ideas. In turn, they respectively contribute to an appreciation of the novel.

*The Moor's Last Sigh* represents a hodge-podge of cultures, as befits cultural hybridity in post-colonial theory. Cultural hybridity is also an in-between state that gives rise to constant oscillations between different cultures. And yet, it should be remembered that the word hybridity is not merely pointing to culture, but also to race

and caste. It is, in fact, more important to explore the impetus that brings about hybridity. In the novel, imperialism and colonization are the significant impetus that calls forth the issue in post-colonial theory. Inasmuch as imperialism and colonization give rise to dislocation and displacement, culture is inevitably transnational. This is well illustrated by Da Gama-Zogoiby family of complicated descent, which means that the family is descended from diverse ancestry, including Moors, Portuguese, Jews, and even Moguls that once ruled India. The hybrid state makes identification more puzzling because situated in-between these different cultural and ethnic groups Moraes is paradoxically both included and excluded by each of them.

Faced with colonization, colonial subjects have no other choice but to deal with their close relationship with the colonizing subjects, and vice versa. Generally speaking, the colonizers endeavor to impose colonial discourse upon the colonial subjects in order to cajole and coerce them into accepting the colonizers as their masters. Therefore, the relationship between colonizer and colonized is seemingly the relationship between master and slave. However, colonial subjects, in effect, demonstrate both attraction and repulsion toward the colonizers. Such ambivalence can be found in Da Gama-Zogoiby family when they are ruled by Britain. Actually, the ambivalence also happens to the colonizers when D'Aeth reveals that he comes to recognize India as his home and that the boundaries between colonizer and colonized have been blurred. Moreover, it is ambivalent that the moment the colonizers establish themselves as subjects by subordinating the colonized to them, the colonized people also perceive themselves as subjects. The relationship between the o/Other is, in fact, established by a series of reciprocal influences that can be regarded as an ambivalent process of identification and subjectification.

‘Cultural difference’ is another idea developed by Bhabha, which he argues emerges from the interstitial space or ‘liminal space’ as well. Since *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is mainly focused upon the two multicultural societies, Moorish Spain and modern India, the idea of multiculturalism is most likely to help explore more meanings from Rushdie’s palimpsesting Modern India over Moorish Spain. Nevertheless, multiculturalism is still a moot point whose definition is subject to change according to different interpretations. I choose to make use of Bhabha’s idea of cultural difference to review and redefine multiculturalism that designates how we take into account a multiplicity of different cultures.

Rushdie makes up the story with a semblance of using bits and pieces from Snow White to Ganesha. His particular way of making up the story can be quite easily associated with Claude Lévi-Strauss’s idea of ‘bricolage’ in *The Savage Mind*. Interpreted with the idea, *The Moor’s Last Sigh* could be thought of as a story that lies halfway between percepts and concepts. In a nutshell, the mythical thought of the story incorporates both concrete reality and abstract sign systems. This is repeatedly demonstrated when Rushdie puts pure fantasy and specific history together again and again.

In the liminal space, different cultures clash and finally negotiate. Such negotiation, according to Bhabha, is more like cultural eclecticism. Cultural eclecticism here in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* does not refer to the hypothesis that different cultures meet and compromise halfway. It carries a vein of liminality, which means there must be a liminal point that shares some features of different cultures. Rushdie tries to achieve such cultural eclecticism by conflate pop culture and high art (culture) throughout *The Moor’s Last Sigh* as a means to construct the structure and plot of the

story. This eclecticism between pop culture and high art is also experienced by Aurora when she enters a later phase of painting style.

Even though *The Moor's Last Sigh* is mainly about a family saga, Rushdie, in fact, encapsulates the world around the family into the story. Therefore, it is not only a family saga, but also a national saga. As Bhabha points out, nation has some things in common with narration. That is, nation could be seen as a narrative construction, as fits Rushdie's arrangement of the thicken plot. All too often Bhabha substitutes the idiolect 'nationness' for 'nationhood' and 'nationality', for he redefines the nature of nationhood by considering it as the liminal image of nation.

Since nation is a narrative construction, it is necessary to examine how Bhabha defines the so-called narration. Although Bhabha does not seem to explicate what the word 'narrative' means in his mind, Gérard Genette's definition of the word may well offset the uncertainty. The definition can also be employed to examine how Rushdie maneuvers the narrative in order to narrate the history of India in a fictive way. In addition, in the course of narrating the nation, the political arena of India seems to rumble loud in the background of the story. Rushdie achieves this effect in the novel by means of both extensive intertextual reference and bits and pieces of history concerning politics. This idiosyncratic method serves as Rushdie's literary policy in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Also, it could be looked upon as his 'politics' in representing the fictional world in the narrative.

These ideas, including hybridity, cultural difference, and nationness, could be thought of as components that make the liminal space more meaningful and more specific. It is a lot easier to get a clear picture of what liminal space is like by piecing together these key ideas. And in turn, these key ideas can well help to evaluate *The*

*Moor's Last Sigh* as a narrative situated in the liminal space.