

## Chapter 2

### A Hybridized Text: Dialectics of Identity and Authenticity

But I, too, have ropes around my neck, I have them to this day, pulling me this way and that, East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding, *choose, choose*. I buck, I snort, I whinny, I rear, I kick. Ropes, I do not choose between you. . . . Do you hear? I refuse to choose.

--Salman Rushdie, *East, West* 211

As is obvious, Rushdie has always demonstrated some concerns, which are recurring in his writing, whether it be fiction or non-fiction. To reductively put, most of his works could be hailed as a permutation of these concerns in a differently reconstructed form. Post-colonial hybridity, for one, is one of these motifs that persistently run through his train of thought in writing. In response to Ameena Meer's feeling that *The Satanic Verses* is more like a story of identities or rather one of mistaken identities in spite of all the exploration of faith in the novel, Rushdie positively agrees and goes on to explicate his own thought of the novel:

[W]hat I wanted to write about was what I had experienced in another way, growing up in a city like Bombay. Because Bombay, much more than Delhi, is a city in which the West is very present. So it's not that I had a sort of pure experience of growing up in India and then came to an

entirely other, Western experience. Even as a child, things were mixed up--the kind of relationship between them was different but the mixture existed. . . . The nature of that mixture, the hybridity of the self, that's what I wanted to write about. (*Conversations* 114)

The mixture or a form thereof shuttles us immediately to Bhabha's idea of liminality and interstices. In the contact zone of cultural differences, colonial subjects are bound to experience the process of hybridization. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, there exists a family saga that represents a liminal space where hybridities are extremely intricate. The narrator Moraes, son of Aurora da Gama and Abraham Zogoiby, is a signifier of all the hybridities that Rushdie is anxious to present in this novel. In addition, he manages to complicate the nexus of hybridities by situating most of the narrative within the milieu of Bombay. As mentioned above, Bombay has been a significant icon at the back of his mind. However, it is quite differently delineated in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. And speaking of Bombay, Cundy observes and distinguishes:

The Bombay of *The Moor's Last Sigh* is rather different from that of *Midnight's Children*. It is a Bombay which hails its Portuguese colonial heritage and whose key inhabitants are from the Jewish and Christian minorities on the Malabar Coast of southern India. The identity of the text's hero, Moraes Zogoiby or the 'Moor', is a blend of Catholic, Jewish, Arabic/Spanish and contemporary Indian influences. (111)

Granted that many works of Rushdie's give an impression that Bombay is not just his birthplace, but also a place he most likely wishes his readers to frequent in his fictive world. This culminates in *The Moor's Last Sigh* getting to evince that the fiction of such a Bombay and such a protagonist alike shows his enterprise to deal with a far

more complicated aspect of hybridity and identity.

Although his treatment of colonial discourse is less pungent than some of his other novels, it still rumbles in the background of the narrative. Or rather, it does exist subtly alongside the family saga. Rushdie plays on words whereby Moraes and Aurora cut to the core of colonial discourse in laconic and penetrating language right in the opening chapter. In response to the then-existing fact that a period during which an influx of imperial dominance takes place in India is called ‘Discovery-of-India’ from the colonizer’s point of view, Moraes poses a question so as to suggest that the colonizer begs the question—“[H]ow could we be discovered when we were not covered before” (*MLS* 4)? Following Moraes’s question, Aurora’s trenchant remarks relentlessly divulge colonial desire by pointing out that “[f]rom the beginning, what the world wanted from bloody mother India was daylight-clear”; that is, “[t]hey came for the hot stuff, just like any man calling on a tart” (*MLS* 5).

The onset of these colonial encounters ushers in the world of ‘masala’, which Rushdie employs to term a section of the novel from chapter 9 through chapter 15.<sup>1</sup> This culinary locution is tactically used to imply the hybrid status both of colonized India and modern India of post-Independence. The way he writes of this seemingly native hodge-podge does not simply stem from his own observation and experiences, but also hinges upon the influence of the West:

The impact of European modernism on writers from Soyinka through to

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<sup>1</sup> *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is divided into four sections, each of which includes a few chapters. The second section is named ‘Malabar Masala’. Malabar refers to Malabar Coast, which is the coastal region of SW India, extending from Goa southward, while masala “is the Hindi word for spices.” “In informal phrases it generally refers to a hodge-podge of elements mixed together to add spice to the final product.” See “Glossary to accompany Salman Rushdie” for much more non-English locutions Rushdie intermingles with the majority of English in many of his books. Available: < <http://www.subir.com/rushdie/glossary.html> >

Rushdie and Ben Okri vividly illustrates not only the ‘impurity’ of influence in postcolonial writing, but the fact that cultural mixing was intrinsic even to the processes that led writers to myth in the first place. . . . There is no end to the hodgepodge of cultural and mythic influences that is postcolonial writing. (Boehmer 203-04)

Confronted with the unstable dynamics of hybridity, colonial subjects would feel somewhat more desirous than ever of re-locating their identities. Those who are active in de-colonization may well believe in the pristine state before the colonial contamination, hence retrieval of authenticity. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the story of Zogoiby-Da Gama clan, to some extent, comes to be a long quest for identity. Of course, most of the time, it can also be a never-ending question of identity and authenticity. Rushdie takes advantage of diversified attitudes of colonial subjects both to contour colonial frontiers and to form a national boundary anew, as well a post-colonial writer might. The mobility of definitions and re-definitions can thus be readily found in this novel, literally or metaphorically, via an interlocutory argumentation.

### **An-Other Problem of Ambivalence**

The four-generation family react with different attitudes to the colonial discourse of the British Empire—Francisco and Camoens take up a nationalist attitude while Epifania and Aires prefer to don Anglophilic attire. Nationalist as Francisco is, he is never one of those who choose to side with extreme nativism. Owing to his

epochal open-mindedness and avant-garde taste, he scouts ‘Le Corbusier’<sup>2</sup> out and has him build two new houses (one is of Western style while the other of Eastern style) in Epifania’s precious gardens, only to be uncomfortable eyesores for her. This episode could be seen as the metaphorical starter to unroll a series of collisions between East/West and Colonizer/Colonized in the narrative.

Redecoration of the private family chapel follows the construction of those two follies. Just as Bhabha appropriates Renée Green’s installation artifact, the stairwell, to further devise and develop his theory of liminal space, Moraes coincidentally speaks of a staircase, in the landing of which the chapel is situated, in order to introduce and depict the chapel:

[In the chapel, there are] the gilded altarpiece with the little inset paintings in which Jesus worked his miracles against a background of coco-palms and tea-plantations, and the china dolls of the apostles, and the golden cherubs posing on teak pedestals and blowing their trumpets.  
(*MLS* 25)

Unlike the two follies, which symbolize the juxtaposition of East and West, the décor of the chapel is otherwise a colonial fusion of two stereotypically contrastive images—one tinged with another—hence the uncanny<sup>3</sup> nature of dislocation. It is in

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Le Corbusier’ is the professional name of Charles Édouard Jeanneret (1887-1965), Swiss-French architect, painter, and writer, who had a major effect on the development of modern architecture. This is one of a multitude of examples that prove *The Moor’s Last Sigh* to be a hybrid text of fact and fiction, like some of his other novels.

<sup>3</sup> Here uncanniness is suggestive of the ‘unhomely’:

But he [Fanon] is far too aware of the dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures to recommend that ‘roots’ be struck in the celebratory romance of the past or by homogenizing the history of the present. The negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the ‘beyond’ that establishes a boundary: a bridge, where ‘presencing’ begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world—the unhomeliness—that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the ‘unhomely’ be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private

this place that the household disagreements occur, for Epifania finds it infelicitous for Francisco to have these decorations—‘all the quality stuff’—replaced with some other things that represent modern decorative art. Nonetheless, it is in this place that subjectification is activated in a synecdochic manner, for the dialectical process between the ‘Other’ and the ‘other’ is meekly manifested.<sup>4</sup> All these icons of Jesus, cherubs, the apostles are automatically reminiscent of the West that implicitly represents the imperial power. But then again, they are altogether situated among the native landmarks of India. Christianity is otherwise given a geographically-nuanced meaning on the one hand. On the other hand, Indian landscapes are revised a little bit with the presence of the Christian religion. Ambivalently, The two sorts of “other/Other” help to regain and redefine each other’s subjectivity.

In effect, the above incident embodies a liminal space as well. Werbner sheds light on Bhabha’s idea of liminality with his personal commentary:

Bhabha (pers. comm.) uses liminality, like hybridity, to refer to the moment or place of untranslatability,<sup>5</sup> the limit where a thing becomes its

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and public spheres. . . . Although the ‘unhomely’ is a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites. . . . The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence. (Bhabha, *LC* 9-11)

In this sense, *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is a novel of the unhomeliness. I would explore it later as the thesis proceeds further.

<sup>4</sup> A distinction is drawn by Lacan between the ‘Other’ and the ‘other’. And also, Gayatri Spivak coins the term ‘othering’ that designates a dialectical process:

Lacan’s use of the term involves a distinction between the ‘Other’ and the ‘other’, which can lead to some confusion, but it is a distinction that can be very useful in post-colonial theory. . . . In post-colonial theory, it [the ‘other’] can refer to the colonized others who are marginalized by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the center and, perhaps crucially, become the focus of anticipated mastery by the imperial ego. . . . The Other can be compared to the imperial centre, imperial discourse, or the empire itself. . . . This term [‘othering’] was coined by Gayatri Spivak for the process by which imperial discourse creates its ‘others’. . . . In Spivak’s explanation, othering is a dialectical process because the colonizing Other is established at the same time as its colonized others are produced as subjects. (Ashcroft et al, *Key Concepts* 169-71 )

<sup>5</sup> Whether or not liminality is an untranslatable moment depends on how one understands Bhabha’s theoretical contentions. Werbner probably centers on the linguistic interpretation of translation. And yet,

alterity. . . . In the colonial encounter, then, it is not just the colonized who are subjected to Western ways; the colonizers too are transformed, while the colonized deploy borrowed forms to tell their own, distinct narratives which ‘unsettles’ and ‘subvert’ the cultural authority of the colonizers.

(136)

The term ‘alterity’ is interchangeable with otherness and difference in post-colonial theory. Here Werbner hints at an othering process in which the other (the colonized subject) can be established as a subject whereas the process of subjectification is always hampered by the colonial discourse and power. Moreover, the colonizing subject is not always playing the role that imparts dominant influence and colonial discourse to the colonized subject. In turn, the colonizing subject receives cultural impacts from the colonized subject. Such a reciprocal influence is a transcultural phenomenon that takes place in the in-between space of cultural contact. The above passage sounds as much as to say the relationship between colonizer and colonized is ambivalent in the liminal space. That is, either of the two could be both the master and the mastered. In a nutshell, the colonial encounter results in hybridity, in which reciprocal impacts are effected between colonizer and colonized and for which the colonizer cannot naively impose colonial fantasy upon the colonized.

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Bhabha seems to lay much more emphasis on the inevitable occurrence of ‘translation’—a re-rendering of culture, race, class, gender, etc.—in liminal space:

The very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities—as the grounds of cultural comparativism—are in a profound process of redefinition. The hideous extremity of Serbian nationalism proves that the very idea of a pure, ‘ethnically cleansed’ national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweavings of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood. This side of the psychosis of patriotic fervour, I like to think, there is overwhelming evidence of a more transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities. Contemporary Sri Lankan theatre represents the deadly conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese through allegorical references to State brutality in South Africa and Latin America . . . . (LC 5)

Although this incident hints dislocation and the ambivalent othering process, it also implies a danger of exerting colonial binarism—that is, the Christian religion as the civilized while the aboriginal flora in India as the primitive. This could be a setback for the post-colonial efforts to retrieve meanings, which warrant Rushdie's yet another dexterous arrangement in the narrative. As Christmas is approaching, Moraes delineates what Christmas is like in India:

There are no trees [Christmas trees] here; instead there is a crib. Joseph could be a carpenter from Ernakulam, and Mary a woman from the tea-fields, and the cattle are water-buffalo, and the skin of the Holy Family (gasp!) is rather dark. . . . Presents—and even this somewhat unloving family makes an exchange of gifts—are for Twelfth Night, the night of gold frankincense myrrh. (*MLS* 63)

In order to render the colonial discourse prevalent and accepted among the colonized, the British would impart their language and culture to the colonized and encourage them to learn. The moment the 'reproduction' is being made, the colonizer may well be confronted with the hazard that what should have been a colonial reproduction turns out to be a parody or mimicry. More important, if read beyond the lines, the passage seems to allude to the three magi<sup>6</sup> by mentioning gold, frankincense and myrrh. The thought of the wise men from the East is blurring the boundary between the East and the West. The stereotypical icon of the religion standing for the colonial discourse or part thereof, too, is symbolically challenged by the nutriments and celebration from the East.

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<sup>6</sup> Magi are members of a priestly caste of ancient Media and Persia. They visited Jesus and Mary and Joseph shortly after Jesus was born; the Gospel According to Matthew says they were guided by a star and brought gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh; because there were three gifts it is usually assumed that there were three of them.



The shadow of Moorish Spain is bequeathed to modern India by virtue of the ancient exile on the order of Catholic Kings Fernando and Isabella. The da Gama family is believed to be of a Portuguese lineage. Not only are the Zogoiby family descended from the Moorish sultan, Boabdil, but they also have a Jewish ancestress who accompanies the sultan. On top of this ethnic hybridity, the arrival of Portuguese, the English, and French, becomes the streams tributary to the hybrid ocean of India. These circumstances altogether complicate the quest for identity, not to speak of authenticity that warrants a post-colonial retrieval of the indigenous status. As the narrator and protagonist of this novel, Moraes thence embodies many kinds of ‘otherness’, which sounds as much as to say that post-colonial identification and subjectification could only be attained through the othering process.

The othering process, as the narrative proceeds, gets a lot more involved. That is, it is an ambivalent process for both the colonizer and colonized whence they derive their identities. What is looming large in India is the British dominance that attempts to reinscribe the body of the colonized with their culture and language in order to reconstruct a new colonial identity for India. The consequence is none the more promising for the efforts. Through the eyes of an Englishman, D’Aeth, this mock-up, as it were, gets the British nowhere in the long run. The only thing he can find is the jibes made by the colonized subjects:

India was uncertainty. It was deception and illusion. Here at Fort Cochin the English had striven mightily to construct a mirage of English . . . [b]ut D’Aeth could not help seeing through the conjuring trick, couldn’t help hearing the false vowels of the coir traders lying about their education . . . and no matter how Anglicised the land might be, it was contradicted by

the water; as if England were being washed by an alien sea. . . . Oliver D'Aeth knew enough to be sure that the frontier between the English enclaves and the surrounding foreignness had become permeable, was beginning to dissolve. India would reclaim it all. (*MLS* 95)

The permeable frontier further suggests that the liminal space, or the contact zone, where cultural differences are negotiated, metaphorically turns into a twilight zone. In this twilight zone, hybridity is a commonplace phenomenon and racial boundaries are always trespassed. As a result, D'Aeth tells Aurora in his dream, "I'm being flayed . . . [and] we will never gain our humanity until we lose our skins" (*MLS* 95).

An English widow, Emily Elphinstone, proffers her point of view to Oliver D'Aeth about what she thinks of Aurora and Abraham:

Those people don't belong here any more than we do, but at least we can go home. One day India will turn against them, too, and they'll have to sink or swim. . . . They were outcasts, she shouted, these peculiar Christians with their unrecognisable hobson-jobson services, not to mention these dying-out Jews, they were the least important people in the world (*MLS* 98).

The widow doesn't know the sound reverberating in D'Aeth's mind is that India is and will continue to be his home. In this process of reconstructing identities, each thinks it important to accomplish a sense of belongingness, only to realize that each of them is 'un-homed', just the same way as Bhabha terms it. It must be remembered that "To be unhomed is not to be homeless" (*LC* 9). In this long quest for identity, each subject is an 'other' in another's mind's eye. It is, however, ambivalent and paradoxical that identification and subjectification are achieved in such a problematic logic. It could

echo Low's argument:

Hybridity is a discourse of partiality which works against the colonial reproduction of (unitary) meaning. . . . Consequently, neither the desire for racial and historical originality nor the demand for absolute obedience—based on this origination—will be met. The formal strategies of disavowal [colonialist disavowal] are also inherently unstable because the Other in the colonial mirror is both a point of identity and a product of a discriminatory gaze. (197)

The British, as D'Aeth foresees, eventually exit from the stage of India. On the night of India's independence, as contrasted with the others' celebration of freedom, Vasco Miranda is otherwise depressed and cannot get at the reason why people around all go on a spree for the end of the colonization. He does not think that they belong to India, for they "read the wrong books, get on the wrong side in every argument, think the wrong thoughts" (*MLS* 166). These remarks point out that the Indian people have been educated in a British way for a long time. Therefore, in Miranda's opinion, there is no returning to the indigenous status. Nor can they claim authenticity of pre-given identities. It is originally one of the strategies in colonial discourse to educate the colonized in a British way in order for them to accept the colonizer as the center of the Empire. When the center is dismantled, it is little wonder that some people, like Vasco Miranda, would think they may as well depart with the British as stay in the unstable land of freedom. As soon as Miranda squalls out his advice, "Get on the boats with the British", Abraham immediately asks him what advice he would give himself (*MLS* 167). Miranda's reply is evidently based on the above influence of colonial discourse—"Don't worry about me. I'm Portuguese" (*MLS* 167). This demonstrates

Miranda gets to identify with the colonizing culture, for the place, Goa, where he belongs, is colonized by Portuguese who rule Goa until 1961, that is, more than a decade later than India's independence.

Despite his seemingly sinister advice, Miranda predicts what the post-Independence India will turn out to be—"This place [India] has no use for you. It'll beat you and eat you" (*MLS* 167). The warning may be given against the oncoming turbulences of communalism. It is intended to be a sarcasm utilized to upset the original dream of decolonization and Nehruvian idealism. Under the British raj, some of the colonized people, including Jawaharlal Nehru, wish to set up a secular nation after independence. Only at this particular moment can we recall again what is significantly embodied in Moraes. All kinds of 'otherness' in Moraes are all the more conspicuous for the grand récit of colonial discourse. In other words, the ideological apparatus of the Empire is not totalizing to the extent that all kinds of 'otherness', epitomized by the Gama-Zogoiby family, especially by Moraes, are expunged thoroughly. The political climate and national circumstances are, however, just as Ghosh comments, "With the rising religious fundamentalisms . . . all plurality and hybridity—all otherness—is cleansed from Indian soil through violence" (137). Perspicuously, Rushdie approves of the idea of a secular India, because he not merely suggests in the narrative that the narrowness of communalism brings about the explosion in Bombay, but also gets it straight in *Imaginary Homelands*:

To be an Indian of my generation was also to be convinced of the vital importance of Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of a secular India. Secularism,

for India, is not simply a point of view; it is a question of survival.<sup>7</sup> If what Indians call ‘communalism’, sectarian religious politics, were to be allowed to take control of the polity, the results would be too horrifying to imagine. (404)

In the wake of the bombing, Moraes’s utterances ensue, “We were our own wooden horses, each one of us full of doom” (*MLS* 372). For Rushdie, religion per se may be “a colonizing power, too, one that has transformed men’s thinking capabilities into slavish mentalities” (Afzal-Khan 164). In spite of the catastrophic bombing, Rushdie seems to cherish hope for the future, as suggested at the end of the narrative by plenty of allusions to rebirth and resurrection. Afzal-Khan observes, “In his novel *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie continues to promulgate his theory of generic/ideological destruction as a prerequisite to renewal” (164). As we can see, this legacy has been inherited by his later novel, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*.

### **Mother India and Feminizing Strategies**

*The Moor’s Last Sigh* is not, as it seems, simply a family saga; it is instead a story of microcosm and macrocosm. It can be construed as such in two aspects. On the

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<sup>7</sup> Rushdie details what is the difference of ‘secularism’ from narrow ‘communalism’ in his relatively recent book, *Step Across This Line*:

Rather, we should understand that secularism is now the fanatics’ Enemy Number One, and its most important target. Why? Because secularism demands a total separation between Church and State; philosophers such as the Egyptian Fouad Zakariya argue that free Muslim societies can exist only if this principle is adhered to. And because secularism rejects the idea that any society of the late twentieth century can be thought of as “pure,” and argues that the attempt to purify the modern Muslim world of its inevitable hybridities will lead to equally inevitable tyrannies. And because secularism seeks to historicize our understanding of the Muslim verities: it sees Islam as an event within history, not outside it. And because secularism seeks to end the repressions against women that are instituted wherever the radical Islamists come into power. And, most of all, because secularists know that a modern nation-state cannot be built upon ideas that emerged in the Arabian desert over thirteen hundred years ago. (238-39)

one hand, the internal affairs of the family are connected to or reflect the external world. On the other, the whole family saga, in some ways, could be looked upon as the epitome or condensation of some certain spatiotemporal sites of the world.

In the colonial discourse of the British nation, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is always fabulized as mother and child. No sooner has Francisco announced that “The British must go” than Epifania protests:

Too many crooks and books have filled your ears. . . . What are we but Empire’s children? British have given us everything, isn’t it? –Civilisation, law, order, too much. Even your spices that stink up the house they buy out of their generosity, putting clothes on backs and food on children’s plates. (*MLS* 18)

Inasmuch as the colonial discourse prevails among the colonized, the British nation would be called “Mother England.” Nevertheless, Rushdie embeds a revised idea of ‘motherness’ into his narrative by inserting an episode about the Bollywood<sup>8</sup> movie ‘Mother India.’ Moraes extends the meaning of ‘motherness,’ telling the readers that “Motherness . . . is a big idea in India, maybe our biggest: the land as mother, the mother as land, as the firm ground beneath our feet” (*MLS* 137). This phraseology hence subverts the British discourse with ease and dismantles its fantasy, or disguised desire, towards India. From this point of view, India regains its wholeness and national identity.

However, the image of Mother India not only refers to the land, but points to Aurora as well. Mother India is originally a role played by the movie actress Nargis,

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<sup>8</sup> Bollywood is the mass-market film industry in India. The Bollywood movies are made in Mumbai, known to Salman Rushdie as Bombay.

but later the designation is shifted from Nargis to Aurora instead. Consequently, it in turn reveals the fact that the mother as land. In this sense, the da Gama-Zogoiby clan is not only microcosmic but macrocosmic as well. It is not merely a reflection of the world, but also an epitome of hybrid societies. Rushdie may be eager to embody the spirit of Hindutva<sup>9</sup> via the family story. The ideal state may serve as a promising future and the solution to the self-destructive sectarianism, because it's not another totalizing discourse, but a large-minded harbor that moors all kinds of otherness and hybridity.

In fact, Rushdie has a consistent philosophy that conflates the idea of crossing the border and the maternal image. The symbolic act of drawing lines is one of Moraes's inheritances, when he professes that "Line-drawing comes down to me from both sides of the family" (*MLS* 73). It comes down from both sides of the family because Isabella and Flory have drawn the lines. Belle draws a line with sackfuls of spices to divide the house into two halves (*MLS* 42). And also, Flory, as a teenager, uses a twig to scratch a line on the ground to part herself from adolescent males (*MLS* 73). On the contrary, in a series of Aurora's paintings, she calls 'Mooristan', the line is

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<sup>9</sup> Here is an excerpt derived from the internet that defines what 'Hindutva' means:

The term "Hindutva" is derived from the two terms 'Hindu Tattva', which literally mean "Hindu Principles." . . . The history of the Hindus is the history of a civilization which has developed in its natural state, without interruption, since antiquity. Its age is dated to be between five and nine thousand years. Hence Hindu History is a prototype of how human civilization would have looked, if civilization all across the globe had been allowed to develop in its natural state. This is the relevance for us to study Hindu Civilization, Hindu History and Hindu Culture. The evolution of Hindu Civilization can be considered to be natural and continuing as there is no last messiah in the Hindu world view. . . . Hindutva is the articulation of this idea of continuity of freedom of thought from which emerge the multifarious Hindu Principles. Two instances of Hindu Principles that symbolize the outcome of freedom of thought are the pronouncements made not today, but four thousand years back by unnamed rishis (Hindu ascetics) that, "This world is one family" (Vasudaiva Kutumbakam) and that "The Universal Reality is the same, but different people can call it by different names" (Ekam Sat Viprah Bahuda Vadanti). In these two proclamations made in ancient Hindu India, we see the seeds of globalism and freedom of thought, four thousand years before the world was to become the global village of today. ("Definition of Hindutva")

being transgressed:

The water's edge, the dividing line between two worlds, became in many of these pictures the main focus of her concern. She filled the sea with fish, drowned ships, mermaids, treasure, kings; and on the land, a cavalcade of local riffraff—pickpockets, pimps, fat whores hitching their saris up against the waves—and other figures from history or fantasy or current affairs or nowhere, crowded towards the water like the real-life Bombayites on the beach, taking their evening strolls. At the water's edge strange composite creatures slithered to and fro across the frontier of the elements. (*MLS 226*)

The depiction of the paintings may sound as mythical and mysterious as can be.

Despite the out-of-the-way representation of the world on the paintings, Rushdie provides, as it were, a supplementary manifesto in *Step Across This Line*:

The first frontier was the water's edge, and there was a first moment, because how could there not have been such a moment, when a living thing came up from the ocean, crossed that boundary, and found that it could breathe. . . . But so, in a way, are we. Our own births mirror that first crossing of the frontier between the elements. As we emerge from amniotic fluid, from the liquid universe of the womb, we, too, discover that we can breathe; we, too leave behind a kind of waterworld to become denizens of earth and air.

The maternal image, getting a breath, and drawing a line altogether converge in the narrative so that it is not so much a family saga as a story of survival. The narrative starts with Moraes's confession—"it is meet to sing of endings"; he chooses to call the



last dying moment of his life “life’s Last Gasp Saloon” (*MLS* 4). Later in the novel, we are aware that he has been suffering from asthma, and at the beginning of the fourth chapter he talks, when dying, about breathing and his family—“In my family we’ve always found the world’s air hard to breathe. . . . At such times I become my breathing” (*MLS* 53). He continues to substitute his own philosophy, or rather Rushdie’s, for the Cartesian sentence.<sup>10</sup> He contends, “It is not thinking makes us so, but air. *Suspiro ergo sum*. I sigh, therefore I am. The Latin as usual tells the truth: *suspirare* = *sub*, below,+ *spirare*, verb to breathe. *Suspiro*: I under-breathe” (*MLS* 53).

Nicknamed ‘Amrika’ and ‘Moska’, Aurora and Uma bear allegorical meanings by which Rushdie denotes the conflicts between them, just as those between the two poles of the Cold War, America and Moscow. Moraes represents India, as a non-aligned state during the Cold War, wooed by the two warring states. On Uma Sarasvati’s first appearance at Elephanta, Moraes’s home on Malabar Hill, Aurora paints a picture named “Mother-Naked Moor Watches Chimène’s Arrival” and opens hostility towards Uma. Moraes thinks of the painting as an expression of Aurora’s “maternal jealousy of her son’s first true love” (*MLS* 247). The relationship between Aurora and Uma should not be reductively interpreted as a tug-of-love, that is, a tug-of-war between Aurora’s maternal love and Uma’s heterosexual love. We should not be oblivious to the fact that the two referents to which they allegorically allude actually stand for armament race and hence masculinity. As we can see in the narrative,

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<sup>10</sup> Rushdie discusses it earlier in “*Daughter of the East*”:

‘*Cogito, ergo sum*,’ Benazir Bhutto muses, translating helpfully: ‘I think, therefore I am. I always had difficulty with this philosophical premise at Oxford and I am having much more difficulty with it now.’ It’s not that she doesn’t think, you understand—actually, she thinks even when she doesn’t want to—but that the thinking doesn’t seem to help her *be*. (*IM* 56)

Moraes’s remarks could be seen as Rushdie’s fictional continuation of the discussion.

many female figures seem to take over the position of the male in order to stand upright in the center, just as Moraes senses it—“The women are now moving to the center of my little stage. Epifania, Carmen, Belle, and the newly arrived Aurora—they, not the men, were the true protagonists in the struggle” (*MLS* 33).

Put at the center of the narrative, women are much abler than men in some cases. As a result of the dramatic conflicts between the Menezes and the Lobos, Camoens and Aires are incarcerated and Camoens, while in prison, decides to divide the family into two halves. It is Isabella who helps to demarcate the family property and to save the family business. Her daughter, Aurora, is also famous for her artistic talent and notorious for a few alleged love affairs. On the day of the yearly Ganpati festival, Aurora dances on the precipitous ramparts of Elephanta to defy “the perversity of humankind, which led these huge crowds to risk death-by-trampling ‘just to dumpofy their dollies in the drink’” (*MLS* 124).

By these depictions of Isabella and Aurora, Rushdie may connote another border that is to be transgressed. It is the stereotypical image that is imposed upon women and that suggests the boundary between the private sphere and the public sphere. It is certain that Rushdie tends to overlap personal lives and public events in his fictions. As Sanga sums up, “In *Shame* (as in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*) there is also the matter of intermingling the private lives of the characters with the public events of history” (85). This is a syncretism that Rushdie always employs in his fictions. Nevertheless, Rushdie may arrange for female characters to embody the kind of syncretism so as to symbolize the act of crossing the border between the private sphere and the public sphere.

Bhabha’s idea of the unhomely has been discussed earlier, and his association of

the unhomely with feminism could help explicate Rushdie's syncretism of the private and the public embodied in women:

By making visible the forgetting of the 'unhomely' moment in civil society, feminism specifies the patriarchal, gendered nature of civil society and disturbs the symmetry of private and public. . . . This results in redrawing the domestic space as the space of the normalizing, pastoralizing, and individuating techniques of modern power and police: the personal-*is*-the political; the world-*in*-the-home. (LC 11)

It is also why I describe *The Moor's Last Sigh* as a novel of the unhomely. By means of such a syncretism, Aurora's gyrations on the ramparts are not simply the art of a dance. They become Aurora's own political gestures that express her argumentation about the ridiculous aspects of religion. Her contemptuous dance, however, is mistaken by people as part of the ritual, so they see "her not as a rebel but as a temple dancer: not the scourge, but rather the groupie, of the gods" (MLS 124). And then she gets to appear on the newspaper. Elephanta is more than a bungalow; it thus becomes a mirror that reflects the world.

One of Rushdie's feminizing strategies is to cross the border of gender by feminizing a few male characters. Women are no longer hidden in the background; they instead foreground the narrative to be visible. Heroic as they may be, Francisco and Camoens decide to commit suicide around their middle age. Abraham and Moraes are humiliated and looked down upon by Aurora. For her, all the men are women's "jailers" who are "the ones holding the cash-books and the keys to the gilded cage" (MLS 170). Solomon Castile, father of Abraham, has never appeared, for he walks out on Abraham and Flory when Abraham is still little. Aires is believed to be homosexual,

so Aurora plays on words to jeer him, saying to Moraes “if it wasn’t prick in the bottom, then, darling, it was strictly pain in the neck” (*MLS* 14). He obviously intends to feminize the narrative in his own way. Ambreen Hai argues:

At the same time he [Rushdie] also suggests that what is considered “feminine” might itself be changed by the oppositional force of his writing, that he too can be feminist in contesting culturally ascribed, constraining gender norms. (17)

Aires’s homosexuality is a reminder of Rushdie’s contention that the act of crossing a border is always happening in any form. Most of all, hybridity, like homosexuality, cannot be one of both; it is in the interstitial place

And last but not least, in colonial discourse woman is the ‘other’ of others; an Indian woman is termed “doubly other” by Sangeeta Ray. Rushdie may employ the doubly other to further complicate hybrid identity. Besides, it could be seen as a subversive feat to resist the normalization of colonial discourse. As Ray puts it, “[t]he putative inclusion of the doubly other (Indian and woman) threatened the myth of the homogeneity and purity of the British nation” (8). *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is a celebration of a hybrid world of otherness, including the Jews and Moors exiled from the Iberian Peninsula, and Indian women (doubly other) under the British rule, and also Christian and Catholic heritage among the post-colonial turbulences. The instant all the otherness congregates in the liminal space, inevitable hybridity is celebrated and differences are negotiated. The process of identification will be progressing in this interstitial space. Rushdie’s mongrelized texts present a world of hybridities where new identity becomes possible. Hybridity is not just a fusion; it is a “dialectical articulation” (Young 23).

### Filmic Representation as Post-Colonial Mirror

Although Rushdie “suggests that what is considered feminine might itself be changed by the oppositional force of his writing”, as Ambreen Hai contends, what the oppositional force of his writing is has not been explicated or detailed. It may be Rushdie’s particular way of writing the narrative. Having written film reviews, Rushdie indeed takes interest in how movies represent cosmopolitan outlooks and how they convey meanings. Blake observes that “[m]ost Bollywood films are action musicals, using fantasy, realism, and a host of Western and Asian traditions and techniques (very like Rushdie’s novels)” (9). Compared with a few essential elements of a movie, *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is just like a novel adapted from a film. The filmic narrative starts with the end of a story. There is a voice-over of the narrator approaching the readers—“I in a far-off country with death at my heels and their story in my hand, a story I’ve been crucifying upon a gate, a fence, an olive-tree, spreading it across this landscape of my last journey, the story which points to me” (*MLS* 3). Also, the readers can, as it were, witness a close-up of a figure sitting in the dark woods. The voice-over continues, “Mine is the story of the fall from grace of a high-born cross-breed” (*MLS* 5). With the voice-over goes on, a filmic flashback on celluloid begins and expands until the end of the filmic narrative that recalls the dying narrator in a graveyard located in the dark woods.

I argue that this is what Ambreen Hai calls the “oppositional force” of Rushdie’s writing, for from some film theorists’ point of view this narrative might be a work of

“male gaze.”<sup>11</sup> What I am arguing here is not that *The Moor's Last Sigh* is written under Rushdie's male gaze. Rather, a lot more meanings of the narrative could be explored by the way film theorists elaborate a film. When it comes down to how Rushdie manages to deal with the bulky part of the story, we get to see it even more clearly with reference to the view of the film theory. The narrative is singular, in that it is not narrated simply by the narrator, Moraes. There is yet another narrator, central character as well, Aurora, whose paintings narrates part of the story. “Most ordinary families can't keep secrets; and in our far-from-ordinary clan, our deepest mysteries usually ended up in oils-on-canvas, hanging on a gallery wall” (*MLS* 13). Therefore, the whole story is comprised of Moraes's ‘narrative’ and Aurora's ‘spectacles.’ Perhaps, Rushdie is ambitious to cross the border that G. E. Lessing delimits in *Laocoön*.<sup>12</sup> Whether he is or not, the juxtaposition does render the narrative very unique in the way it represents the story. Aurora's paintings stay alongside of Moraes's narrative. Moraes divides the so-called “Moor paintings” of Aurora into three periods:

[T]he ‘early’ pictures, made between 1957 and 1977, that is to say

between the year of my birth and that of the election that swept Mrs G.

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<sup>11</sup> Childers and Hentzi defines the term ‘male gaze’ as below:

Film theorists have used this term to describe the way that mainstream cinema constructs the vision of the spectator. To engage the viewer's interest, these films rely on two conventions: narrative (the logical progression of events and actions featuring a central protagonist) and spectacle (the interruption of narrative progress for the sake of visual show). Representations of women have traditionally been essential to moments of spectacle in mainstream film, from the showgirl's dazzling number in musicals to the fragmenting images of parts of the body in cinematic close-ups. Women are objectified and exhibited, to be looked at by men in the film—and, correspondingly, by members of the audience. In terms of narrative, viewers identify with the active male protagonist these films predominantly cast. Not subject “to being looked at,” this character rather carries the look and pushes forward the story's action. Spectators are given a sense of control, a command over the world of the film's story, through the male figure. (173-74)

<sup>12</sup> In *Laocoön*, G. E. Lessing works out his own principles of aesthetic perception when comparing poetry and the plastic arts. In spite of Homer's excellent talent, his epic cannot disclose some visions that the visual arts can.

from power, and of Ina's death; the 'great' or 'high' years, 1977-81, during which she created the glowing, profound works with which her name is most often associated; and the so-called 'dark Moors.' (*MLS* 218).

As a result, there is only one narrator, but there are two points of view.

The above division of the Moor paintings, in a way, shows that Aurora's paintings mirror her concerns about the family and the social/political changes alike. The year of 1977 is the end of the Emergency,<sup>13</sup> which seems to be a significant historical moment for Rushdie. For Aurora's paintings, the year is a watershed that signifies the change in her painting style. This change is certainly to mirror the change of the external world. For Moraes, he is deeply convinced that "[a]fter the Emergency people started seeing through different eyes. Before the Emergency we were Indians. After it were Christian Jews" (235). During the Emergency, Aurora hands Moraes his passport and a one-way airline ticket to Spain because of Indira Gandhi's hatred towards Aurora. She wants Moraes to flee from the political turmoil. Most of all, she hopes Moraes can trace back to one of his origins. And yet, she warns him against going to England, saying "Only don't go to the English. We have had enough of them. Go find Palimpsest; go see Mooristan" (*MLS* 235). Here Aurora denotes their ethnic hybridity by the word palimpsest. The family's multi-layer identity is successfully echoed by Rushdie's multifaceted narrative.

*The Moor's Last Sigh* is itself somewhat filmic, and into this filmic narrative are

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<sup>13</sup> In June 1975, Indira Gandhi was accused of corruption during the 1971 election campaign, hence her loss of parliamentary seat. She then declared the national state of emergency. During the period of emergency, she centralized her power, tried to foster the economic growth with some devised measures, and decreased the national birth rate. In 1977, she lost yet another comeback election, hence the end of the emergency.

some other films encapsulated. One of them is “Mother India,” in which an Indian peasant woman, Radha, played by Nargis, is “idealized as bride, mother, and producer of sons” (*MLS* 139). The image of Radha is contrasted with that of Aurora—the former is a traditional woman in an Indian village while the latter avant-garde artist in the metropolis Bombay. This contrast helps to locate or negotiate a new identity for women, metaphorically for India, in the gap between the traditional idealism in India and the inevitable changes and influences. Radha may represent the pristine status of India before the invading influences of the imperial hegemony; Aurora represents “the realm of the beyond” where to “locate the question of culture” (*LC* 1). As a woman different from the old ages, Aurora’s “creativity” and “marginality” can be the resource Rushdie resorts to when writing the narrative. Therefore, Ambreen Hai argues, “Rushdie will suggest increasingly both that women have a distinctive oppositional creativity, often because of their marginality, and that this power can be a trope that he can appropriate for” (17).

There is another film mentioned by Moraes; it is named “Mr. India,” obviously the counterpart of “Mother India.” In this film, the protagonist is a “slick young loverboy” with his heroic powers that lead Moraes to depict him as a “made-in-India runty-bodied imitation Bond” (*MLS* 168). The protagonist’s name, Mogambo, is known to have been derived (“filched”) from “the title of an old Ava Gardner vehicle, a forgettable piece of African hokum” (*MLS* 168). The name is carefully chosen to avoid offending any of religious sects or political communities. Although Moraes criticizes it as “the crudest of all such nationalistic formulations,” Rushdie seems to suggest and to reflect the religious and political climate in real-life India.

Through this multi-layer filmic narrative, Rushdie arranges a vision not for



‘male gaze’ but rather for ‘post-colonial gaze’, for the vision is not of “the showgirl’s dazzling number in musicals or the fragmenting images of parts of the body in cinematic close-ups” (Childers and Hentzi 173) but of India’s traditional idealism, nationalism, and communalism. The films mentioned in the narrative, though coarse and flamboyant, are part of India. Also, they are contrasted and balanced with Aurora’s artistic and prophetic visual arts. Whether in the coarse films or in Aurora’s paintings, we see at least one thing shared in common, that is, the masala style. Those crude films include common secular concerns and mimicry of the West in order to entertain the audience. However, there is a much sublimer motif in her paintings that all too often construct a spatiotemporal site of history. In the contested site history is increasingly complicated and sedimentary as time proceeds forward. That is the reason why Aurora tells Moraes to find the “palimpsest.” Rushdie emphasizes again that hybridity is inevitable under the influence of colonial power and globalization.

“Mother India” and “Mr. India,” in fact, reminds us again the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, for they respectively invoke the images of mother and father. Under colonial discourse, the colonizer takes on the appearance of “the imperial M-Other” and “the Symbolic F-Ather.” Both the “imperial Other” and “Symbolic Other”<sup>14</sup> are the colonial vehicles through which the colonizer normalizes

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<sup>14</sup> Ashcroft employs Lacan’s theory to explain how colonial discourse exerts its power over the colonized:

The Other can be compared to the imperial centre, imperial discourse, or the empire itself, in two ways: firstly, it provides the terms in which the colonized subject gains a sense of his or her identity as somehow ‘other’, dependent; secondly, it becomes the ‘absolute pole of address’, the ideological framework in which the colonized subject may come to understand the world. In colonial discourse, the subjectivity of the colonized is continually located in the gaze of the imperial Other, the ‘*grand-autre*’. Subjects may be interpellated by the ideology of the maternal and nurturing function of the colonizing power, concurring with descriptions such as ‘mother England’ and ‘Home’. On the other hand, the Symbolic Other may be represented in the Father. The significance and enforced dominance of the imperial language into which colonial subjects are inducted may give them a clear sense of power being located in the colonizer, a situation corresponding metaphorically to the

the colonized. However, the two films mentioned in the narrative are not the embodiments of the two colonial ideas. Instead, the readers are presented with an image of modern India, in which it is hybridity that prevails, not the colonizer. Identity, as suggested in the films and in the narrative, is always performative in two ways. One way is to mimic, and the other is to see and to be seen. Whenever Rushdie adopts either one of the two ways in the narrative, he suggests that pure identity and authentic originality are always impossible. The whole narrative, just like the films and Aurora's paintings, trespasses the border of time and space only to find a palimpsestic concoction in a single family. This is why Rushdie intends the narrative itself to be hybridized so that one cannot name it in one single word. Nor can one pigeonhole the novel into a generic archive or genre. So, it is small wonder that Hagedorn concludes her review of the novel by saying:

Shameless, innovative, irreverent, difficult, visionary, hilarious, accessible. Call it what you will—futuristic-contemporary-historical-postcolonial-multicultithriller, spicy potboiler, slapstick, arty mystery, steamy love story, sudsy soap opera, moral fable, exhilarating adventure, tragicomedy—Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* is a great mother of a book. (25)