

**About ‘Hybrid’ Identities and ‘Interstitial’ Spaces:
A Reading of Salman Rushdie’s *Moor’s Last Sigh* and
*Enchantress of Florence***

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In “Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition” (*PMLA* 119), Shu mei-Shih articulates the necessity of resisting those “omnipotent definitions” (18), in global literary studies, that are prompted by the paradigmatic forces of the West/mainstream/dominant discourses. She analyzes that these ‘definitions’ not only reduce postcolonial literatures into mere “representational machineries” of the nation-state (Prasad 72) they also conceal the basic attribute of literatures: their political and aesthetic autonomy.¹ Taking the cue up from Shih’s argument, in this article I explore the possibility of developing an alternative critical discourse vis-à-vis post-independence Indian writing in English by diasporic authors. To establish my argument I use Salman Rushdie’s novels, *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995)² and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008)³ as case studies.

In this article I argue that Indian literatures by diasporic writers are as ‘real’ as those written by Indians writing from home. Though criticized for generating imaginary maps and boundaries (this is how Rajaswaree Sundar Rajan has opposed Vikram Chandra’s writing) these literatures have played a vital role because, to quote Salman Rushdie, “the broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one supposedly unflawed” (*Imaginary Homelands* 15). Rushdie’s definition, of Indian writing in English by diasporic authors, offers an interesting alternative to the

existing discourses that underline the archeological dimension of diasporic literatures. For example, Vijay Mishra observes that such literatures, by unearthing and preserving fragments of the past, make known only a 'fossilized' fragment of the original nation that seeks renewal through a 'refossilization' (4). In the present context of displacement, dislocation and transnationalization of cultures, however, writings by diasporic authors sketch a new world geography and re-define national and cultural identities. These literatures affirm Stuart Hall's claim that the "politics of identity", in contemporary global studies, is based on the "politics of position" (226). Here I try to situate Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *The Enchantress of Florence* within this current "practice in negotiation and exchange" (Behdad 4)⁴ where the text is "conceived as a kind of itinerary mediated by a complex network of diasporic conjectures, conflicted histories, hybrid identities, and conditions of displacement and transplantation" (1).

In *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, Elleke Boehmer has noted that the articulation of national consolidation through literature — characteristic of the nationalist movements that developed in opposition to the colonial condition — has led to the growth of a significant trait: from Bankimchandra to Ngugi wa Thiongo, almost all dissenting intellectuals, (whether in the 19th or in the 21st centuries) had/have to face "a stern imperative challenge" (186) that compelled them to take an "oppositional stance" (187). This has given rise to "nationalist", "combative, cause-led, and, often unashamedly polemical" (188) literatures. Boehmer has also stated that that the texts which forged/forge the "not-quite" and the "in-between" state through transcontinental/trans-cultural/transnational drifts significantly rupture the national consciousness through their fragmented notion of identity. Yet, though they offer an alternative to the grand monolithic narrative of the nation-state by illustrating the "unhomely" condition they remain generally neglected.

In the introduction to *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha asserts that we, as literary critics, should try to understand this 'unhomely' condition that is shaped through the formation of 'hybrid' identities. We should no longer classify groups of people through monolithic classifications. Unlike Said, who divides the world into opposing binaries, Bhabha challenges this opposition through his concept of the ambivalent relationship that exist between binaries. He speaks about an 'intimacy' which, by being necessarily 'interstitial', questions and fractures simplistic binaries. Homogeneity, according to Bhabha, is a misleading notion waiting to be replaced by

the pluralism intrinsic to nations and cultures.⁵ The concept of identity is multifarious; it is trans-cultural and fragmented. Hence, identity politics needs to be re-defined through the works of diasporic authors. Rushdie's *Moor's Last Sigh* and *Enchantress of Florence*, from this view-point, are important as both are enigmatic in the sense that they are written by an author, exiled, under the *fatwa*, looking for some non-place to hide in and preach his idea of secularism. If the term diaspora is used as a metaphor that voices the trajectories of displacement and dislocation, as Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai and others have done, then, Rushdie's novels make use of this metaphor only too well.

The title *The Moor's Last Sigh* of Rushdie's 1995 novel relates the Alhambra Palace at Granada — Moorish Spain's red fort mirrored in those of Mughal India at Delhi and Agra — to a narrative of twentieth-century India. The famous sigh it refers to was that of Muhammad XI (Boabdil), the last Sultan of Andalusia, who, in 1492, looked back at Alhambra in order to bid farewell to his kingdom and thus ending the Arab-Islamic rule in Iberia. Moorish Spain becomes representative of multiculturalism: the Muslims, the Catholics and Jews co-existing there. On the other hand, 1492 was the year when "the Jews were offered the choice of baptism or expulsion" (Goonetilleke 131). It was also "the year when Columbus, financed by Boabdil's royal conquerors, Ferdinand and Isabella, sailed forth to seek a new route to the East" (131). Vasco da Gama ultimately made it in 1497. The year 1492, therefore, recorded a moment of both fusion and fission. For Rushdie, then, a phase of Spanish history becomes a defining metaphor for India. But the novel is not historical.

The protagonist-narrator, Moraes Zogoiby, descends, on his mother's side, from an illegitimate offspring of the Portuguese, Vasco da Gama, and, on his father's side, from an outcast Jew who had an illicit relationship with the exiled Boabdil. Though the author's main concern is contemporary India the novel presents a "historical panorama" (Goonetilleke 131) where Rushdie uses the past not only to show the evolution of history but also to highlight what has befallen our country today. The narrative does not merely present a simple contrast between the past and the present. Moraes' story shows that life in Cochin, in the early years of this century, was better than that of present-day Bombay but the violence and cruelty then was no less than what it is today. We are reminded of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* in which "the love of Elizabeth and Leicester is more glamorous than that of the typist

and the clerk but both are equally sterile” (132). The novelist shows how a “human deficiency” is “embedded in the course of history” (133) both in his India and in Eliot’s England.

What is most significant is the focus of the novel: on the minutest minorities in India, the Portuguese Catholics and the Jews of Cochin. They form an integral part of India and, so, with their very existence they challenge the nationalist myth of the monolithic nation-state. With multiple parental lineages there is an element of mystery about Moraes’ birth: as the novel shows his father could have been either Abraham Zogoiby or Jawarharlal Nehru. The subtext divulges that both might be responsible for his birth because he seems to have inherited qualities from both – from Abraham, ruthlessness; from Nehru, secularism. In other words, Moraes Zogoiby is a hybrid; he is a hybrid Indian, one who personifies the hybrid quality of the postcolonial nation itself. It is only natural, then, that his ayah, curiously named Jaya He, introduces him to the diversity of India, suggested in the national anthem itself: “Thy name rouses the hearts of Punjab, Sind, Gujarat and Maratha/ of Dravida and Orissa and Bengal ...” (*India 1991* 23). In Moraes we find the articulation of the problematic of minority-identity: “Before the Emergency we were Indians. After it, we were Christian Jews” (*Moor’s Last Sigh* 235). As D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke puts it:

The Moor’s Last Sigh is a sequel to *Midnight’s Children*, written from a different perspective. Its main concern is with the phase of history after *Midnight’s Children*, but it begins at the same point. ... That Moraes lives, and declines, at twice the normal pace is a metaphor for the change that has come over life in the present. ... All this shows Rushdie’s coherent and changing vision, governed by current events. (135-36)

Moraes Zogoiby is like a sensitive seismograph recording the distresses that run through the Indian body politic: the brutalization of the Indian psyche, the corruption, the chauvinism and so on. Through his portrayal of Bombay — the centre of multiculturalism and secularism and also a centre under siege — he records the fissure between the dream and the reality. The hypothetical narrative, that India is a placid nation-state, contains fragments within, those to be found out only by a hybrid like Moraes. His very existence not only becomes a challenge to the concept of the grand monolith it amplifies his own longing for a secularism that

is fast fading out in the country. In the end, thus, he is linked to Luther because he nails his life story on a door for the public to see and read. With a Boabdil-like sigh he escapes to a graveyard above Vasco's Alhambra. Like Christ he dies at the age of thirty-six, only to re-awaken, like Arthur in Avalon, to lead conquering armies. His becomes a global identity transcending the national. He becomes the representative of all those who have fought against the dictates of sovereignty: to Christ, Luther, Arthur and to Boabdil. Sovereignty, Rushdie asserts here, is threatened by ideas of pluralism and so it constantly engages with the politics of exclusion. For this reason his aim is to search for "lost ideals" and for "home" (Goonetilleke 145). Though, according to Goonetilleke, the "general trend and content of the novel suggest a closure of possibilities" we find that "Nadia Wadia and the conclusion suggest that there is room for optimism" as does "the teeming multifariousness of India" (145).

Rushdie's 2008 novel, *The Enchantress of Florence*, shows the author portraying a similar hybrid narrator-protagonist whose actual name is 'Niccolo Vespucci but is disguised as Mogor dell' Amore. The narrative site is set in Akbar's empire. Rushdie has called this novel more 'historical' or 'factual' and his 'most researched book' with complete with a bibliography in the end (*Interview 1*). In the "Exclusive Interview with Salman Rushdie" taken by Kate Muir, on April 4, 2008, for *The Times*, he states: "It would surprise people to know how much was rooted in truth, how little I had to invent". The storyline spans over more than half the world known during the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries — the Indian sub-continent, the sea coast of Africa, the Safavid Empire of Persia, the Ottomans, Europe, England, and the newly 'discovered' America — and ascertain the fact that "the origins of globalization go far back" (Goonetilleke 178). The characters like Qara Koz, Mogor dell' Amore, Argalia, Ago Vespucci, have travelled and have connected different parts of the world. Rushdie observes that he "originally intended to set the story completely in Europe, but ended up dividing the narrative between two great civilizations that barely knew each other" (*Reuter* April 16, 2008). With the cities of Florence and Fatehpur Sikri emerging as two major centres of multiculturalism and secularism, the hybridity and transnationality of the characters make their stories turn these places into a-historical spaces of negotiation and exchange. The stories of these two cities, with their interesting characters, dispute the West-initiated discourse of a homogeneous nation-state.

The visual appeal of the opening scene is like that of any Hindi blockbuster: Mogor dell' Amore enters Akbar's capital city. He is a European stranger with "startling yellow hair" (Goonetilleke 179), attired in European outfit, "standing tall and upright acrobatically on a bullock-cart travelling on an uneven highway" contrasted to the "the onion-shaped domes and turrets of Fatehpur Sikri" (179). Mogor turns out to be an enigmatic figure: almost Machiavellian in his designs. He is not only a murderer but also an adventurer. He says that he wants to meet Akbar in order to secretly deliver a message from Queen Elizabeth I. The interesting point unfolds when he claims kinship to the King. He asserts that Akbar happens to be his uncle because his great aunt, Qara Koz, happens to be related — remotely a cousin — to the Mughal Emperor. That Mogor is a dazzling story-teller, like Sheherezade of *The Thousand and One Nights*, is revealed when he weaves the story of the enchantress, Qara Koz, later known as Angelica, and bedazzles Akbar who, at first, believes his story completely. The narrative of a Muslim lady travelling to Europe, using different men to get her way through, unravels the existence not only of hybrid identities and interstitial spaces but also celebrates a world of the imagination "before the real and the unreal was segregated forever and doomed to live apart under different monarchies and separate legal systems" (*Enchantress of Florence* 221).

Rushdie's portrayal of Akbar is solely based on historical accounts. But the author, in particular, emphasizes the complexities of the Mughal emperor's self-doubt and his immense infatuation with Mogor and the narrator's (false) representation of Elizabeth I, the "faraway redhead queen" (69), sending love letters that remained unanswered. Rushdie also discloses Akbar's "megalomaniac fantasies of creating a joint global empire that united the eastern and western hemispheres" (74). Akbar is shown as having uncommon traits: having a vigorous mind guided not so much by self-aggrandizement as by idealism. It is his pursuit of beauty that compels him, finally, to find comfort in the imaginative story of the Enchantress. Till the end we are intrigued by the fact that the figure of Kara Qoz might be a figment of imagination, one created to instigate the Mughal Emperor's fantasy. Amidst this captivating story Akbar emerges as "a firm believer in the policy of universal toleration"; the omniscient narrator summarizes the contradictions in his character: "a Muslim vegetarian, a warrior who wanted only peace, a philosopher-king" (33) the last reminding us of Plato's *Republic*. He also envisions a "culture of inclusion"

(317). It is interesting to find him emerging as an early proponent of hybridity (though this concept was not available at his time).

When taken together Mogor dell' Amore and Emperor Akbar give us glimpses of two Renaissance worlds — Florence and Fatehpur Sikri, the West and the East, physical desire and intellectual enchantment — tied together through the mysterious figure of the enchantress, Qara Koz, who belongs to both the East and the West. Qara Koz, therefore, has a “western mirror” in Elizabeth I. Rushdie’s message seems to be that “there are such things as universals ... the worlds were more like each other than unlike” (Interview in *The Spectator*, April 9 2008). The novel concludes with Akbar’s a-historical/trans-historical prophecy: “The future would not be what he hoped for, but a dry antagonistic place ... harshness, not civilization, would rule” (*Enchantress of Florence* 347). Goonetilleke observes:

Rushdie’s obsessions – free speech, migration, hybridity and globalization – remain in *The Enchantress of Florence*. But he is departing from serious interpretations of the present and liberating himself to entertain, like the old oral artists, creating fantastic arabesques of fancy and humour, dealing with love, beauty and aspiration. The novel is serene and playful. Rushdie now seems to be enjoying being ‘totally eligible, single and available’. The summing up of the novel should be Rushdie’s own: ‘pleasurable funny sexy international story’. (184)

The kind of “international” aspect that Rushdie speaks about, perhaps, shows how diasporic writers, like Salman Rushdie, grapple with the problem of identity. N. Jayaram argues, in “Identity: A Semantic Exploration in India’s Society and Culture”, that “in India individuals do not see themselves as abstract entities devoid of attributes”. He adds: “Having multiple identities, invoking specific identities in different spheres of life, and reacting to the perceived identities of others, all seem to be socio-culturally embedded. Both the self-perception of one’s multiple identities and the perception of and reaction to the identities of others are learned as part of one’s socialization” (Tazi 146). Is Jayaram’s analysis applicable to those who live “unhomed” lives, to those who are, going back to the etymological root of the term ‘diaspora’, “scattered like seeds”? With these questions in mind, Rushdie’s novels lead us to the following query: are diasporic Indian writers capable of articulating “both the self-perception of one’s multiple identities and the perception of and

reaction to the identities of others” in the way the Indian writers residing at home do? If so, how can hybridity be linked with the notion of identity?

Francoise Král explains how critics, like Appadurai, Bhabha and Hall, have used “the term diaspora as a metaphor” (12). Rushdie’s novels not only exemplify Král’s view-point by resisting “the bipolar model” (13) of Safran and others but also “interrogates, destabilizes and ultimately debunks what Sudesh Mishra refers to as ‘the three discrete columns’ (Mishra, 2006, 57), the homeland, the hostland, and the ‘ethno-national cluster’” (13). Following Král’s argument, my reading of *The Moor’s Last Sigh* and *The Enchantress of Florence* reveals “the potential” of diasporic studies “as a site of hybridic ... identity redefinitions” (Král 13) and analyzes how, in Hall’s words, “cultural identities are the point of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture” (226). Hall significantly asserts that identity is “not an essence but a positioning” (226).⁶

Thus, for a writer like Salman Rushdie the “multi-situatedness of diaspora implies a duplication of patterns of referentialities, whereby a ‘multi-consciousness’ becomes not only possible but highly probable” (Král 15). This is a view “quite close to Radhakrishnan’s definition of diasporic subjectivity as ‘a mode of interpretative in-betweenness’” (Král 15). The hybridity of Rushdie’s protagonists — Moraes and Mogor — is illustrative of Hall’s perception that the “politics of identity” is the “politics of position” (Hall 226). It redefines identity as “a mode of interpretative in-betweenness” (Král 15), one that is “outlandish” (Israel x) in nature. In the works of diasporic writers, Rushdie for example, then, we see how the “... representations of diasporic experiences do not have to fit into pre-existing, mutually exclusive categories but can afford to be less clear-cut, to straddle divides and thus testify to an in-betweenness which would never find its way through the questionnaires devised for a census or for certain type of sociological studies” (Král 24). A new category is “invented by the author” (Král 24) through a “diasporic self-fashioning” (Israel 17)⁷, that is, through an attempt to “setting-up and up-setting” (Israel 15) and, then, fashioning “a self out of (a) place” (16). Self-fashioning, Nico Israel explains, “arises from Greenblatt’s interest in ‘the power to impose a shape upon oneself’” (16). He states that in the case of displaced individuals — the diasporic people — a reversal of the Lacanian ‘mirror stage’ — that is “the self deludes itself into selfhood” and, hence, “proceeds on a path from ‘insufficiency to

anticipation', ... one that protects from the persistent challenge of the other" (16) — takes place. Both Moraes and Mogor, therefore, are diasporic in the sense that their identities are neither rooted nor fixed, their recognition of the self proceeds, in the reverse, from anticipation to insufficiency. As if "unmoored", without any place to locate themselves, their "self" try to "fashion itself by identifying others, by presenting a coherent spatial and cultural geography in which all can be mapped, comprehended" (Israel 16).

"Diasporic self-fashioning" (Israel 15) gives rise to the hybridity of the protagonists of *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *The Enchantress of Florence* and presents "a unique locus" which challenges the "traditional definitions of identity inherited from the nation state" (Král 15). It evolves a space, outside any geopolitical location, one in which a dialogue between cultures, nations and its peoples can be generated with "a certain critical vibrancy and insight" (14). Such identity, with the "dynamic potential of its porosity", initiates a "metaperspective" (15). For this reason, perhaps, Rushdie's "invisible ... imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (*Imaginary Homelands* 20), as those delineated in these two novels, are as genuine and as indispensable as the real India, thereby showing how a diasporic writer is capable of portaying "the homeland after the break and from an outside perspective" (Král 75). These novels reveal, in Král's words, that "it is precisely when a culture cannot be compared to others, when its singularity and difference asserts themselves more powerfully than the similarities with our own culture that we are on to something, that we start to grasp cultural differences, not the essence but the actual existence of cultural diversity (25).

Notes :

1. In the essay "Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition" Shu-mei Shih speaks about the need to resisted West-centric dominant discourses that tend to categorize Third World literatures and discourses mainly as exercises in Postcolonialism. In "Exiles at Home — Questions of Turkish and Global Literary Studies", Hula Adak asserts that Global Literary Studies view Third World literatures as "frozen" in "celebrating nationalism and independence", which is the second phase of Gugelberger's "triadic developmental paradigm" (21). In her concluding paragraph, she states:

... if we want literary studies to be global, we must listen to Third World

Criticism not just to grasp the historical and cultural context of the national literature in question (inviting Third World literary critics as native informants) but also to understand this criticism's comparative modus operandi, its dialogue with the theories of the Euro-American academy ... Giving voice to Third World literary criticism has a double emancipatory potential: it may break the debilitating monopoly in global literary studies of theories that do not consider the historical and cultural contexts of Third World Literatures, while breaching the silence Third World literary critics who can neither write back (consenting or resisting) nor wake up from the nightmare of such 'omnipotent definitions'. (25)

2. *The Moor's Last Sigh* is the fifth novel by Salman Rushdie, and was published in 1995. Set in the Indian cities of Bombay and Cochin, it is the first major work that Rushdie produced after the *The Satanic Verses* affair, and thus is referential to that circumstance in many ways, especially the isolation of the narrator, as well as the shadow of death that seems constantly to hang over him. It is written in the same style as *Midnight's Children*, and raises issues of individuality and the possibility of hybridity in a world moving toward singularity. The title is taken from the story of Boabdil (Abu Abdullah Muhammed), the last Moorish king of Granada, who is also mentioned frequently in the book. The spot from which Boabdil last looked upon Granada after surrendering it is known as Puerto del Suspiro del Moro ("Pass of the Moor's Sigh"). The mother of the narrator and an artist friend of the mother's each make a painting which they call "The Moor's Last Sigh". *The Moor's Last Sigh* traces four generations of the narrator's family and the ultimate effects upon the narrator. The narrator, Moraes Zogoiby, traces his family's beginnings down through time to his own lifetime. Moraes, who is called "Moor" throughout the book, is an exceptional character, whose physical body ages twice as fast as a normal person's does and also has a deformed hand. The book also focusses heavily on the Moor's relationships with the women in his life, including his mother Aurora, who is a famous national artist; his first female tutor; and his first love, a charismatic, demented sculptress named Uma. The book won the Whitbread Prize for 'Best novel' in 1995, and the Aristeion Prize in 1996. The book was also shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 1995 (Compiled from Wikipedia).
3. *The Enchantress of Florence* is the ninth novel by Salman Rushdie, and was

published in 2008. According to Rushdie this is his “most researched book” which required “Years and years of reading”. The novel was published on 11 April 2008 by Jonathan Cape London. The central theme of *The Enchantress of Florence* is the visit of a European to the Mughal emperor Akbar’s court and his claim that he is a long lost relative of Akbar, born of an exiled Indian princess and an Italian from Florence. The story moves between continents, the court of Akbar to Renaissance Florence mixing history, fantasy and fable.

Part One:

The tale of adventure begins in Fatehpur Sikri, the capital of Mughal emperor Akbar the Great, when a stranger arrives, having stowed away on a pirate ship captained by the Scottish Lord Hauksbank, and sets the Mughal court talking and looking back into its past.

Part Two:

The stranger begins to tell Akbar the tale, going back to the boyhood of three friends in Florence, Il Machia, Ago Vespucci and Nino Argalia, the last of whom became an adventurer in the Orient.

Part Three:

The tale returns to the mobs and clamour of Florence in the hands of the Medici dynasty.

The book relates a succession of interweaving stories by a variety of storytellers, travellers and adventurers and of course touches on the histories and cultures of the various settings including the Mughal and Ottoman Empires, the earlier Mongols, and Renaissance Florence. There is a strong theme of sex and eroticism, much of it surrounding the Enchantress of the book’s title, who was inspired by the Renaissance poem *Orlando Furioso*. There is also a recurring discussion of humanism and debate as opposed to authoritarianism, and Machiavelli is a character in the book. Similarly to Rushdie’s previous works, the book can be considered a work of magic realism (Compiled from Wikipedia).

4. In *Belated Travelers* (Durham & London: Duke Univ. P, 1994), Ali Behdad critiques nineteenth century travel writing and its active function in European colonialism. He critiques those travelers who, he argues, have arrived late because by the time they traveled through the ‘Orient’, tourism and colonialism

had already converted the exotic into the familiar. Thus, these travelers, having missed the authentic experience of the 'Orient', could view the East (Near East) no longer through the lens of Orientalism. In fact, Orientalism itself became a complex phenomenon sans a single developmental tradition. Behdad sees it as shifting field of practices that was ambivalent and discontinuous. He also views his own discursive practice as "belated" (2), in order to highlight the heterogeneity and plurality of Orientalism.

5. In the interview titled "The Third Space" Bhabha says: "[F]or me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. The third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom" (211).
6. Stuart Hall, in *Cultural Identity and the Diaspora*, argues that this "sense of difference" is not the "pure 'otherness'" that engendered/engenders the formation of binaries like the East/West, Us/They; rather it remains elusive to, and outside of, the stark oppositional forces operating within both colonial and postcolonial discourses. Hence, Hall suggests: "... we need to deploy the play on words of a theorist like Jacques Derrida. Derrida uses the anomalous 'a' in his way of writing 'difference' — *differance* — as a marker which sets up a disturbance in our settled understanding or translation of the word/concept. It sets the word in motion to new meanings without erasing the trace of its *other* meanings" (115). Hall's belief that identity-politics should be based on/ generated from "difference", thus, tries to unsettle existing discourses by rupturing those grand-narratives that are viewed as "omnipotent definitions" by Shu-mei Shih.
7. Developing his theoretical structure from a vast array of intellectuals like Martin Heidegger, Edward Said, James Clifford, Paul Gilroy, Benedict Anderson, Paul de Man, Aijaz Ahmed, Rob Nixon and even from cultural theorists Bruce Robbins, Nico Israel, in *Outlandish: Writing between Exile and Diaspora*, uses two concepts: "exilic emplacement" and "diasporic self-fashioning" (17) in order to reconfigure the trajectories of displacement. As he distinguishes between exile and diaspora Israel states that the latter has "lately surfaced with increasing frequency in critical theory". He adds that "in the context of its

appearance in Deuteronomy” though diaspora is connected to “a curse, with a perpetual otherness amid others, with blindness, madness, and defeat [...], with a spreading that weakens” (2) it has a positive resonance in its articulation of “a sense of tenacity, resistance, and preservation of faith during the worst of circumstances” (2). Israel, therefore, proposes a theoretical framework that helps him in the “mode of reading between exile and diaspora” (ix). He uses the term “outlandish” (x) to define the in-between state that exists between the two conditions of dislocation and displacement, namely exile and diaspora, and describes it as “nondescript, nebulous” (x). He states:

The words “exile” and “diaspora” each contain a curious contradiction. “Exile” denotes banishment from a particular place in an institutional act of force ... it also expresses a sense of “leaping out” toward something or somewhere, implying a matter of will. “Diaspora” indicates the dispersal or scattering of a body of people from their traditional home across foreign lands; yet, like the agricultural sowing of seeds from which the word comes to us (from the Greek *speirein*), it also suggests an anticipation of root-taking and eventual growth. Beginning an intellectual project, especially a project about exile and diaspora, places one in a strangely analogous contradictory position. Perched precariously between familiar zone of knowledge and an uncharted destination, the writer in the beginning, leaps into the nebulous betweenness of force and will, cohesion and dispersion. (1-2)

While analyzing the in-betweenness between exile and diaspora Israel asserts that the mode of writing which articulates the “outlandish” (ix) state takes “neither side or refuge for granted” and, thus, reveals the “movement from modernism to postmodernism, from coloniality to postcoloniality”. He also observes: In terms of contemporary literary and cultural studies, at least, “exile” perhaps most closely associated with literary modernism, tends to imply both a coherent subject or author and a more circumscribed, limited conception of place and home. Maintaining a stronger link to minority group solidarity and associated with the intersection of postcoloniality and theories of poststructuralism and postmodernism, “diaspora”, by contrast, aims to account for a hybridity or performativity that troubles such notions of cultural dominance, location and identity. (3)

While analyzing “diasporic self-fashioning” Israel shows how the Lacanian “self deludes itself into selfhood, a scenario that takes place in the arena of otherness” (16), a phenomenon best understood through the “mirror stage”:

... the subject, entering the domain of the other (including the other’s place

and language), proceeds on a path from “insufficiency to anticipation,” from a fragmented body image to an “orthopedic” one, and lastly, “to the assumption of the armor of an alienating identity, one that protects itself from the persistent challenge of witnessing the other. (16)

He argues that “in the case of the displaced writers ... such a scenario unfolds in reverse” (16):

... the encounter with the other (who is, in this sense, perceived as a coherent subject) often entails a movement from anticipation to insufficiency. Unmoored (especially when alienated from the mother tongue), the self tries to fashion itself by identifying others, by presenting a coherent spatial geography in which all can be mapped, comprehended. Such identification can occur in quasi-anthropological, philosophical, or literary-historical discursive forms, or combinations of all three.

When we think of self-fashioning in terms of being subject to displacement, what emerges for the writers ... is a peculiar case of both process and condition. What typically results is wounded autobiography, a type of self-fashioning that is melancholic in the Freudian sense of being temporarily arrested in time. For Freud, it is worth remembering, a melancholic’s sense of loss can be “some abstraction which has taken the place of the loved one, such as one’s country”.... Loss troubles the very status of the displaced writing subject, rendering the act of self-fashioning diasporic. (16-17)

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