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Locating the ‘inbetween’

- Hybridity, Magic and Identity in
Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*

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Abbreviations

- IH* Rushdie, Salman. "Imaginary Homelands." *Imaginary Homelands: essays and criticism, 1981-91*. London: Granta, 1999.
- Pass* Derrida, Jacques. "Passages—From Traumatism to Promise." *Points... Interviews, 1974-1994*. Ed. Weber, Elisabeth. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995. 372-398.
- Psy* Derrida, Jacques. "From Psyche: Invention of the Other." *Acts of Literature*. Ed. Derek Attridge. London: Routledge, 1992. 310-343.
- OG* Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998.
- "That" Derrida, Jacques. "...That Dangerous Supplement..." Trans. Gayatri Spivak. *Acts of Literature*. Ed. Derek Attridge. London: Routledge, 1992: 78-109.
- TSV* Rushdie, Salman. *The Satanic Verses*. London: Vintage, 2006.
- UG* Derrida, Jacques. "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce." *Acts of Literature*. Ed. Derek Attridge. London: Routledge, 1992. 253-309.

Introduction

“Robinson Crusoe,” Edward Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism*, “is virtually unthinkable without the colonizing mission that permits him to create a new world of his own in the distant reaches of the African, Pacific, and Atlantic wilderness” (75). Written at the establishment, rather than at the height, of the British Empire, Defoe’s novel from 1719—the first of its kind—about the stranded Englishman on a deserted island told the tale of the New World and so brought a piece of it back to London. Yet *Robinson Crusoe* not only portrayed the native and the exotic surroundings to the emerging English bourgeoisie, but also pronounced the value of labor, judgement and preservation in surviving this nameless setting. Crusoe himself embodies the figure of an extremely practical and secular being, in creating his little territory on the island. As such, the novel contains a structure which, according to Robert Marzec, “stands as a formal diagram for future colonial developments” (131). It is safe to say that *Robinson Crusoe* became a *Bildungsroman* for the knowledge of the ‘Other.’

Said’s argument goes further than that however; the introduction of the novel also marks the beginning of a colonial writing in mutual support of the project of imperialism. A novel like *Robinson Crusoe* represented and ‘explained’ the remote shores of European exploration, but it also reproduced and upheld colonial politics by turning imperialism into an ‘adventure.’ This was a typical feature of the 19th century novel: when spread at home, it added to imperialism a sense of “*continuity*” (Said 88). As the existence of the empire continued in the English novel, so was the ‘real’ empire expected to do the same. The role of the novel was thus “not to raise more questions, not to disturb or otherwise preoccupy attention, but to keep the empire more or less in place” (88). This was particularly true for those novels which do not have colonial quests as their setting, but where the empire takes up “a codified, if only marginally visible, presence” (75). An example would be Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret*

Agent which is set in London, the center of the empire. London, with “an atmosphere of powdered old gold” and a sun “of punctual and benign vigilance” (15-16); in other words, wealthy from colonial rule but never without losing the sense of accuracy or civilization which made that wealth possible. Although merely hinting at the empire, Conrad—just like Dickens in *Great Expectations*, or Austen in *Mansfield Park*—still assumes and ‘naturalizes’ the existence of the empire, which becomes, according to Said, an example of what he calls a *consolidated vision* in which the novel and the imperial mission followed the same basic understanding in content and form.

Another similar example is Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*. The novel takes place in India under British rule, but more than so; it aims at representing ‘India’ within the space of the novel. India lays at the hands of the British conquerors, as a land that could be made known and enclosed in representation. Map-making is relevant here, as is the extreme structuring of time and place that occurs in Western, ‘realistic’ novels like Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, exemplified in “[t]he navigational routes, the lines on a map, the rational cartographical space” (Wilson 210). Yet, it is also a matter of relating Enlightenment preferences for individual rationale with a particular kind of perspectivism in colonial writing. David Harvey argues that as knowledge about the world increased, it also spun a tendency to view the “globe as a knowable totality” (246). Maps represented the world in this way, just like Western writing did—from a solid point of reference and with a fixed perspective. Thus, Western writing provided a sense of security and stability, and with a clear ordering of things “[t]he diversity of peoples could be appreciated and analyzed in the secure knowledge that their ‘place’ in the spatial order was unambiguously known” (250). The fixing of the colonies in this writing presupposed in other words the authority of, and belief in, the writer, but also a shared, *consolidated*, cultural belief with its readers.

A Western writing of history has unambiguously lead to uneven power relations in the dichotomy of colonizer/colonized. Consequently, writers from the peripheries of the old colonial centers aim at reversing the colonial gaze of 18th and 19th-century realistic novels and *write history anew*. This is where one can begin talking about the genre of *magical realism*, and especially its relationship to postcolonial literature. In *Magic(al) Realism*, Maggie Ann Bowers writes that Salman Rushdie, as one of those postcolonial writers, wants to “bring into question the truth of the British version of Indian colonial and postcolonial history” (67). It is less a matter of following, let alone examining, conventional Western writing, and more about actually challenging its claim of being ‘true.’ Magical realism disrupts familiar notions of time and space and is therefore, as Zamora & Faris argue, an “exploring [of] boundaries” (5).

In this essay, I intend to investigate the correlation between magical realism and postcolonial theory through Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses*. Particularly, I will investigate the narrative space of the ‘inbetween’ of the notion of hybridity, as it is defined by Homi Bhabha. The central question here is in what way magic expresses a non-European world view and to what extent the space of the inbetween serves as a location for postcolonial identity. Compromising authenticity and change, the hybrid space is ambiguous and its origin complex. How can it be grasped through the narratives of magical realism? After discussing *The Satanic Verses* in relation to theories of hybridity, I will show that magic—especially through Rushdie’s use of metaphors—is a way of not only describing that ambivalent hybrid space, but also of recognizing the way culture shifts and giving a voice to what otherwise has been marginalized. I will also make a case that the magical metamorphoses in *The Satanic Verses* manage to articulate hybridity as the creation of something *new*—without a recourse to old essentialism, but nevertheless expressed as from within.

1.1. The features of magical realism

In speaking about the nature of magical realism, first thing to note is that the term itself is an oxymoron, joining the two supposedly opposite notions ‘magic’ and ‘realism.’ If there also is an ambition in magical realist literature, it would reasonably be to erode the distinction between these two notions. This joining could be summarized in one of the typical features of magical realism: the fact that “magical things really do happen” (Faris 167). By its very definition, magical realism invites the supernatural within the sphere of the ‘real.’ This works in two ways. Either, the text is seen as *subversive* as it “alternates between the real and the magical using the same narrative voice,” or *transgressive* as it “crosses the border between the magic and the real” (Bowers 67). The first gives equal status to magic and the real but considers them as separate world views, whereas the second tries to see the common ground of the two. It is in other words through the transgressive view that it is possible to talk about the creation of a new space: the magical real.

The consequence of realizing that ‘magical things really do happen’—that the survival of young Gibreel and Saladin from a 30.000-feet fall from a plane crash in *The Satanic Verses*, or the wings of the man in Garcia Marquez’s “A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings,” are fully natural, almost mundane, events—becomes, as Zamora & Faris puts it, an insight that magical realism “is no less ‘real’” (3) than conventional, Western-based realism. This conclusion is then based on the fact that magical realism builds its ‘logic’ on other cultural traditions like myths, legends and folktales. The ancient afro-American myth of slaves who after their death were able to fly back to native Africa becomes for example the cultural reference from which Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* depicts men who can fly (Bowers 94). Rushdie brings in various influences: parts from the Quoran, Indian classics and Bollywood movies with Western popular culture, attempting to portray ‘his’ India, which “has always

been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity” (Rusdhie qtd in Bowers 53-4). As Gibreel and Saladin fall from the plane, the novel’s very first line reads Gibreel calling out: “To be born again [...] first you have to die. Ho ji! Ho ji” (3). This turns into a sort of mantra, assuring what could be their survival from their fall, or perhaps their re-birth on English soil. The ‘unreal’ survival of the two men is an example of magic being used through an “ontological” (Bowers 90) perspective; that is, Rushdie justifies the supernatural through traditions from his own Indian culture—in this case, the Hindu concept of Reincarnation.

With magic fixed in historical realities, its occurrences are treated not only straightforwardly, but also with detailed precision. Contrary to fantasy, ‘the fantastic’ is not dimmed by a veil of mystery, but becomes part of the “phenomenal world” (14). In describing magical events with a lot of detail, magical realism uses a realistic framework to develop the magical with a sense of “growing within the real” (15). This is something that happens also in science fiction, where an innovative representation of the future—what Darko Suvin calls the “novum”—is made familiar through “scientific rigor” (Moylan 43). In *The Satanic Verses* magic is confronted in broad daylight, as Rosa Diamond, the old widow, finds Gibreel on the shore outside of her beach house. Refusing to believe in ghosts as the “scarification or a flapping sheet, so pooh and pish to all *that* bunkum” (129), she sees ghosts as ‘unfinished business’ and understands Gibreel to be the figure of a *real* angel—her deceased husband coming to life again. The two victims on the other hand do not speculate too much over their miraculous survival; instead Saladin complains about a bad breath and Gibreel about the cold and slushy snow on the beach: “God, yaar [...] no wonder these people grow hearts of bloody ice” (131). At the same time, the narrator replies: “What did they expect? Falling like that out of the sky: did they imagine there would be no side-effects?” (133).

By relating to magic in such a casual manner, *The Satanic Verses* demonstrates the incorporation of ‘real’ and ‘magic,’ which Bowers saw as the ‘transgressive view’ of magical realism. Furthermore, the union of magic and the real creates a “hesitation” (Faris 17) in discursively locating the text. This is when the incongruity of narratives turns into a productive new space, one in which meaning systems become questioned and opposed. Stephen Slemon argues that as two conflicting discourses appear within the same narrative, there is a “battle” for meaning. However, meaning doesn’t arrive and so closure is deferred:

Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the ‘other,’ a situation which creates disjunctions within each of the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences, and silences. (409).

Now, the presence of “gaps” in the narrative is vital for the *postcolonial* ambition of the mode, i.e. to represent the idea of multiplicity and cultural change. They become the moment in which the system—in this case Western hegemony over the definition of realism—can indeed be subject to indeterminacy and challenge. Slemon says that “generic classifications are complicit with a centralizing impulse in imperial culture” (408) and consequently, magical realism would by its refusal to become classified as one or the other motivate a blurring of the boundaries of cultural and literary genres.

When Slemon refers to a ‘suspended’ dialectic, this could represent, as Bowers interprets it, the “tension between the ever-present and ever-opposed colonized and colonialist discourses” (98). It is not very controversial to argue that at the time of colonization, there were great disparities between the European and the non-European understanding of what was ‘real’ or ‘magic.’¹ When these two perspectives

¹ It is important here to recognize the Western basis of these two terms, and the problems therefore in assigning them to a particular worldview. In fact, European conceptions of ‘magic’ were used by the colonialist powers in order to categorize and define obscure cultural rituals of the natives (Bailey 14).

meet in fiction, a tension might thus seem quite natural. Yet, when neither is dominant over the other, a reading will demand a re-thinking of the margins that surround the concepts 'real' and 'magic.' Magical realism resists immediate decoding and thus "forestalls the possibility of interpretive closure" (Slemon 410). Thereby, these 'gaps' occur which conventional logic does not overcome.

1.2. Narrative space and the source of magical realism

Jacques Derrida says at one point that literature "in principle allows one to say everything" and that this freedom implies a "duty of irresponsibility" (qtd in Attridge 36). By way of its force, literature should be used to move mountains and to radically alter conventional views. Magical realism is often regarded as deconstructive. Scholars see it as a "reaction" (Rosenberg 16), an "absence of obvious judgements" (Chanady qtd in Bowers 4) or a "corrosion within the engine system" (Zamora & Faris 6). Now, this follows from Slemon's idea of 'gaps'—yet, magical realist fiction also fills these gaps with narrative meaning. Rawdon Wilson states that reading always involves a sense of spatial understanding which may or may not correlate with the outside world—this does not affect what we consider genuine: "Whether you think of the worlds in fiction as 'possible,' 'alternative,' or simply fictional does not matter much [...] what counts is that they are linguistically created" (217). Hence, the use of magic does not disqualify a novel's validity. On the contrary, its narration "bridges the gap between ordinary and bizarre" (220) and fictional space thus makes representation of the strange and the obscure discursively possible.

Speaking about fictional space, one might think that narrative logic somehow always makes magic possible. This is not the case. The use of magic is, in fact, a major element of bringing the plot forward. In the most controversial parts of *The Satanic Verses*—those in which Rushdie refers to The Quoran—the narrative voice is that of a

dreaming, or mentally delusive Gibreel: “*Mahound comes to me for revelation, asking me to choose between monotheist and henotheist alternatives, and I’m just some idiot actor having a bhaenchud nightmare, what the fuck do I know, yaar*” (109). The hallucinatory Gibreel who is afraid of taking himself seriously and later on in the story “no longer recognizes the distinction between the waking and dreaming states” (457) is thus the narrative source for a significant part of the book—a part that also became the cause of the great political stir resulting in the *fatwâ* against Rushdie in 1988. This point proves, if nothing else, that also ‘irrational’ storytelling may set off very real responses. As Freud explains in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, a dream “does not think, calculate or judge in any way at all: it restricts itself to giving things a new form” (507). What Freud calls the “dream-work” of a dream is thus fully illogical and without meaning; it must be interpreted or translated to make sense.

For Gibreel, this grey zone becomes the prerequisite for narrating the plot. It can therefore be related to Faris’s notion of ‘defocalization’ in which the narrative “seems to come from two radically different perspectives at once” (43). The wide scope of a narrator that is able to see both ghosts and streetlife at the same time must live within what she calls the “ineffable in-between” (45). Here, it might be a good point to make an important distinction; compared to surrealism, magical realism does not explain the unexplainable through what could be the narrator’s mind only. Doing so, as Bowers writes, “takes the magic out of recognizable material reality” (24). Hence, *The Satanic Verses* shows that Gibreel’s ambiguous narration is based on the world around him, as the dreams turn real and he *becomes* the Archangel Gibreel alive in London. Waking up, so to speak, is a revelation for him: “The doctors had been wrong, he now perceived, to treat him for scizophrenia; the splitting was *not in him, but in the universe*” (351, my emphasis). In other words, a defocalized

narrator is thus someone who can *experience* that ‘ineffable in-between’ and not just *imagine* it.

At the same time, defocalization obscures the source of narration, or rather: “its perspective cannot be explained, only experienced” (Faris 46). Therefore, the magic ability of the narrator is unexplainable—originating in a mysterious place that can be understood perhaps best through Freud’s notion of a dream’s ‘navel’: the knot which interpretation cannot undo, and which therefore becomes the very *source* where “the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium” (525). Faris says: “it is not the magical events themselves that are ineffable, because they are often described in detail, but the fact that they are present within an otherwise realistic narrative” (45-6). This must imply that the source of the magical elements is not some remote location in time or space, but emerges in a fictional space that allows for the sphere of the ‘inbetween.’ Faris talks about a ghostly narrator, or “the presence of a spirit” (63), but I do not believe that these powers are divine or imply the existence of a sacred location within the text. Instead, magic uncovers itself from *inside* the text, as Wilson explains: “The magicalness of magical realism lies in the way it makes explicit (that is, unfolds) what seems *always to have been present*” (226, my emphasis). This puts the idea of the ‘real’ and its conventional form of representation, that is, realism, under scrutiny. It holds that realism is an excluding representation, not only towards a non-European view of history, but also towards what could be essentially human understandings of real events. In short, magic seems then to be able to represent truths, processes, and feelings that have traditionally been marginalized in realist literature.

2.1. Hybridity and magical realism as postcolonial language

If there is one thing that unites magical realist narratives, it would be that they exist in that ‘ineffable in-between.’ Making a transition from magical realism to postcolon-

ial thought, one can relate that space of the inbetween to what Homi Bhabha calls 'hybridity.' Bhabha says for example at one point that magical realism is the "literary language of the emergent post-colonial world" (1990: 7), but then a relevant question arises: where does the postcolonial fit within the space of the inbetween? If magical realism is 'subversive' in its deconstruction of Western realism, does this mean that the literary mode successfully expresses postcolonial identity? The heart of the problem is the question whether magical realism can signify transcultural hybridity when both the terms 'magic' and 'real' arguably belong to Western metaphysics. It follows, Liam Connel argues, that magical realist narratives "focus on an effect derived from the incongruity of myth and rationalism" (qtd in Bowers 122) and, therefore, they uphold the old colonialist understanding of a fundamental difference between 'primitive' and 'rational' civilizations. Another critic, Robert Young, shows how the term hybridity is juxtaposed to an essentialist notion of colonialism as static; Englishness has been "represented in terms of fixity, of certainty, centredness, homogeneity, as something unproblematically identical with itself" (2). In reality, as Young holds, the situation was much more complex—something also Bhabha recognizes.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha describes hybridity as a 'liminal space'—an in-between that is "neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past" (1-2). It is this space between two opposites, the space at the border, that in fact constitutes the difference of the opposites. As McLeod argues, "[b]orders are important thresholds, full of contradiction and ambivalence. They both separate and join different places" (217). At the same time, hybridity is a state marked by the 'beyond,' which "signifies spatial difference, marks progress, promises the future" (Bhabha 5-6). Yet, this state of the beyond is unlocatable. Hybridity seems in other words to be that which breaks down divisions, by locating *Being* in the middle of these divisions, at the space of the borders. Hence, the paradoxical nature of hybridity: by signifying existence in a space

'between,' hybridity both deconstructs divisions and categories as well as claims existence on the basis of being part of, yet still outside or *beyond*, these divisions or categories. The hybrid being is thus a living deconstruction of a binary division, yet dependent on the enduring division for the foundational space of the 'in-between.' It would seem impossible for hybridity to escape an essentialist division of identities, as long as it responds to it. By being its product, a 'post-term' of it, hybridity must both acknowledge *and* resist the binaries in-between which it lives.

Implied in Bhabha's concept of hybridity is thus an impossibility of an outside to the past; we are caught in our history. Although the fall of imperialism has opened up a space for alternative views, the scene is perhaps still defined by the old empires. As such, the emergence of the new must go through established terrain. Chambers maintains that the "general mode for the post-colonial is citation, re-inscription, re-routing the historical" (23). *The Satanic Verses* moves between London, Bombay and the imagined city Jahilia in an attempt to define the new world. London, with its old glory from the age of the empire, is redefined by Rushdie into "*Elloven deeowen*." Yet, the city seems to have a difficult time adapting to the new era of the postcolonial: "London had grown unstable once again, revealing its true, capricious, tormented nature, its anguish of a city that had lost its sense of itself and wallowed, accordingly, in the impotence of its selfish, angry present of masks and parodies" (TSV 320). Instead of change, there is a sense of loss—as if London suffers from its decolonized Self, degraded into a city of nothingness, or caricature. At the same time, there is the dream city of Jahilia, which is "built entirely of sand [...] the quintessence of unsettlement, shifting, treachery, lack-of-form" (93-4). The disparity between the two cities is

obvious; one lives on in the shadow of its past, of what it has lost, whereas the other is constantly rebuilt in movement—like the *diaspora* far removed from one’s origin.²

Rushdie sees *The Satanic Verses* as a narrative of “impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas [...] a love-song to our mongrel selves” (qtd in Smale 97). True, the plot figures events, characters and places that are more or less transitory in nature. Take Gibreel and Saladin, both part of the movie industry—one as a famous actor and the other working as a voice over; they spend their lives in England as characters of others scripts. Their roles are not to be themselves, but to live in a state of acting and imitating parts. They are travelling performers, seeing themselves on stage, turned into flat images of widespread Indian references like Bollywood and *Mahabharata*. As immigrants, their lives develop into a search for identity somewhere between the pastiche of their own culture and the promise of fame in the West. This is most of all true for Gibreel, who not only acts, and benefits from his acting skills, but remains very much an actor also in real life. His laidback attitude and casual style (stuffing his mouth full of pork “to prove the non-existence of God” (*TSV* 30)) makes one think of him as superficial and constantly slipping away from any liabilities or roots. His former wife Rekha appears as a ghost, and his on-and-off lover, ‘ice queen’ Alleluia Cone, seems so frail that she hardly exists: “her skin possessed the colour and translucency of mountain ice” (*TSV* 30).

Gibreel’s shallowness and the ease with which he seems to adapt to his new life in England make him embody what Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan’ calls a ‘metropolitan hybridity’—that is, one which is closely related to a “sense of *jouissance*” and an identity that lies “comfortably in the heartland of both national and transnational

² For a more careful definition of ‘diaspora’ see for example Braziel, Jana Evans & Mannur, Anita. *Theorizing Diaspora*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

citizenship” (159). This can be seen as a successful, ideal hybridity. It is also perhaps the more utopian model of the state of living ‘in-between.’ The other, more negative, side of hybridity according to Radhakrishnan is the ‘postcolonial version,’ which is distinguished by its “extreme pain and agonizing dislocations” (159). In this state, the migrant is torn between home and present, desperately looking for a way to include his or her roots and past into the new living condition. Saladin personifies this agonizing reality of being lost; he is obsessed with his identity, trying hard to see himself as English, yet cannot escape his Indian past (in particular the troublesome relationship with his father). Fawzia Afzal-Khan writes: “Forever metamorphosing, [Saladin] remains a hybrid: neither this nor that, neither here nor there” (165). Here is thus the more troublesome form of hybridity, the failed one, where Saladin neither becomes fully accepted by, nor truly integrated into, the dominant society.

In his elaboration of the two versions of hybridity, Radhakrishnan holds that the metropolitan, ‘smooth’ version overshadows the other, negative side of hybridity: “[it] would have us believe that hybridity is ‘subjectless’” when, in fact, “hidden within the figurality of hybridity is the subject of the dominant West” (159). What follows is that hybridity from this point of view is not intrinsically ‘neutral’—behind the post-modern façade of decolonialist societies lies power structures. Metropolitan hybridity is for example more accepted, as it lies closer to the Western norm of the secular individual. In other words, there is normative hybridity and unacceptable hybridity. Yet, Radhakrishnan also makes clear that authenticity is “complicitious neither with the deracinating imperatives of Westernization nor with theories of a static, natural and single-minded autochtony” (162). To find validity for cultural expression, a source for narration if you like, seems to require the marginal space on the border—an identity constructed ‘from within.’ However, such a place might remain illusory. The diaspora—as that “radical nonname of a nonplace” (173)—holds a theoretical possibility for

rerouting the historical and for claiming new identity. Yet, compared to its painful realities, this vision should perhaps be seen as a myth. A diasporic condition without a territory neither constructs authenticity, nor authorizes the hybrid identity within discourse; it simply constitutes a false sense of belonging: a ‘double’ consciousness (174). This is when hybridity slips into what Bhabha calls ‘mimicry.’

2.2. Ambivalence and mimicry

Now, mimicry originates in an *ambivalent* colonial discourse. Within this discourse, subject positions are not permanent; there is always a space—“its slippage, its excess, its difference” (Bhabha 122)—in which the colonized can approach (or, as Fanon would have said, satisfy his or her desire to become) the colonizer. Yet, the colonized can never *fully* become the colonizer—just like Saladin in *The Satanic Verses* never fully qualifies as an Englishman. Mimicry is thus a process that keeps the colonial subject in a state of “partial presence” (123). It is discursive allowance of movement, with an ulterior motive. For as Bhabha writes, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (122). At the same time, it is vital not to disregard the “double articulation” of mimicry; that is, the fact that it not only produces, and safeholds, partial beings, but, “in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (127). The ‘slippage’ is itself quite versatile and contradictory, because it exercises power through mimicry, yet opens up a space for contestation of this power. Ambivalence both empowers and weakens the colonized, diasporic subject. It can be seen through Slavoj Žižek’s notion that every ideological system includes a ‘leftover,’ which “*far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it*” (43). By way of attraction, the colonial doctrines invite the colonized to become its greater part, as in the Althusserian ‘interpellation.’

Nevertheless, Bhabha argues, the “desire to emerge as ‘authentic’ through mimicry is the final irony of partial representation” (126).

If one is to adopt a cynical point of view—which Frederic Jameson tellingly sees as the typical totalizing manner by which critical philosophy tends to view *the system* so that “the theorist wins” (567)—mimicry could be that instance when ‘difference,’ for what it is worth, is incorporated, maintained and ‘specified,’ to borrow from Foucault, within that surveilling system. Bhabha writes in “Dissemination” how plurality within the nation becomes defined as “many as one [in which] the *one* is [...] the tendency to totalize the social in a homogenous empty time” (222). Under its democratic or multicultural umbrella, the nation still talks in one voice. Yet, this idea would assume what Young so criticizes, namely, that the nation, or its discourse and ideology, is a solid entity. Instead, I believe a more careful understanding of the formation of identity can be found through Derrida’s notion of ‘iterability.’ This term explains the balance at the core of Being between the repeated and the new, and it elucidates the functioning of discursive formations. Iterability thus:

both repeats the same and—by repetition itself—introduces into it what we call in French the *jeu* [“play,” “give,”], not simply in the sense of the ludic, but also in the sense of that which, by the spacing between the pieces of an apparatus, allows for movement and articulation—which is to say history, for better or for worse. (Derrida qtd in Attridge 64).

Contexts of various forms, Derrida maintains, are open towards “recontextualization” (63), and they are so from within the system that is confronted. The same idea comes back in Bhabha: ambivalence opens up a space: “the minus-in-origin that results in political and discursive strategies where adding *to* does not add up” (232). Mimicry would be to add to the minus in order to reach zero, yet it can be filled (or emptied) to mean something different than what it invites the subject to signify. In the nonplace

of the diaspora, the blankness calls for historical possibilities: a “re-articulation of the ‘sign’ in which cultural identities may be inscribed” (Bhabha 246). An intriguing yet delicate prospect becomes the question of how to articulate difference and otherness, without reinstating myths and a static notion of identity, let alone falling into an ironic and superficial figure—a Gibreel-type of a lost Self?

2.3. Strategies of articulation

Within postcolonial theory, some scholars recognize the need for ways of ethnic articulations for the marginalized group from where to define subjectivity within the fluid landscape of postmodern identity politics. An example—although afterwards discarded by the scholar³—is the idea put forward by Gayatri Spivak called ‘strategic essentialism.’ In an interview, she says: “I think it’s absolutely on target to take a stand against the discourses of essentialism, universalism [...] But *strategically* we cannot” (11). A prerequisite of any political resistance is a definition of one’s belonging in a group, and such definition will always involve generalizations; therefore, Spivak says, “[y]ou pick up the universal that will give you the power to fight against the other side, and what you are throwing away by doing that is your theoretical purity” (12).

By using another of Spivak’s terms, the ‘subaltern,’ and drawing on its original use by Antonio Gramsci, Radhakrishnan argues similarly that throughout history, the subaltern has been defined as to “what it is not” and must consequently produce self-awareness, such as “its own hegemonic identity” (167). Radhakrishnan outlines his strategy for expression of cultural identity, which is the recognition of an “ethnic self” as part of the “diasporic self” (175). He says, similar to Spivak’s reflection that strategic essentialism is “not a search for coherence” (11), that the diaspora should not

³ See p. 35 of Danius, Sara & Jonsson, Stefan. “An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.” In *boundary 2*, Vol. 20, No. 2. (Summer, 1993), pp. 24-50.

strive towards a fixed ethnicity: “mainstreaming is not the answer at all” (176). At the same time, the expression of a diasporic identity “is unthinkable unless ethnicity is coordinated as a ‘critical elsewhere’ in active relationship with the status quo” (176).

Although these strategies of cultural manifestations take the hybrid state of the migrant as its condition from which to generate articulation, they might ignore what Bhabha sees as a key feature of hybridity—its *untranslatability*. In other words, what characterizes that cultural sphere of the ‘in-between’ is “at once, the *time* of cultural displacement, and the *space* of the ‘untranslatable’” (322). Within the communication of and between cultures, there will always be certain difference as the prerequisite of their signification. Bhabha explains through Benjamin how difference leads to a ‘foreignness’ in translation, which must be overcome through language. As such, innovation within hybridity must always respond to the idea of flux:

The ‘newness’ of migrant or minority discourse has to be discovered *in medias res*: a newness that is not part of the ‘progressivist’ division between past and present, or the archaic and the modern; nor is it a ‘newness’ that can be contained in the mimesis of ‘original and copy’. (Bhabha 325).

For Bhabha, culture finds its most fertile ground in the ambivalence of modernity. It is natural, he seems to argue, that colonizer and colonized—both affected by practices of mimicry—unavoidably find themselves in that ‘Third space’ in which signification is always haunted by a profound doubt. In other words, culture is always *alive*. As is the case with magical realism, hybridity finds its meaning in the gaps of meaning. In fact, hybrid identity—the birth of ‘newness’—originates in the same type of split that was typical for magic; namely, the ‘suspended relationship’ of cultural systems whose clash and incompatibility opens up for *re*-presentation.

In *The Satanic Verses*, the division between good and evil, exemplified through Gibreel’s halo and Saladin’s horns and hoofs, is one of many which gets problematic-

al. It is as if Rushdie wants to illustrate the way concepts merge in that hybrid space. The ghost of Gibreel's deceased ex-lover Rekha Merchant grunts at the Archangel Gibreel, on a quest to bring good to the streets of London: "I wouldn't trust that Deity of yours either [...] This notion of separation of functions, light versus dark, evil versus good may be straightforward enough in Islam [...] but go back a bit and you see it's a pretty recent fabrication" (*TSV* 323). Rushdie seems to suggest that divisions and boundaries are products of our own imagination, and at the beginning lies the 'inbetween.'

3.1. Re-presentation of history

Magical realist *re*-presentation aims at keeping history alive. How to know the past? Considering the new historicist argument that the "understanding of historical texts is to an important extent shaped by the socio-cultural reality" (Bertens 182), the need for narratives that represent other voices becomes strong. At the same time, the question is *how* history should be understood. Amy Novak argues, in a reading of *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje, that history relies on memory, yet the process of remembering does not mirror past events but is really an "act of translation" (208, discussion of Walter Benjamin). To understand history is thus to acknowledge the multiple and fragmentary nature of memories, which are always susceptible to influence by the contemporary. Historical events remain alive in memories; hence, their origin, like Freud argues on dreams, cannot be understood outside of representation.

In the writing of history, magical events—despite their 'irrational' logic—manage in fact to express parts of history that, for some, are very real. As the case in *The Satanic Verses*, they do so despite, or perhaps because of, their metaphorical, dream-like status. For just as Gibreel in the beginning of the novel escapes the British authorities, Saladin is taken for an illegal immigrant and put into a police van. Inside

the van, at the company of the intimidating immigration officers, Saladin desperately tries to prove his citizenship. At the same time, his body begins its metamorphosis that gradually dehumanizes him. A painful yet fascinating battle is played out in front of the officers: Saladin's frantic assurance that he is *one of them*, citizen and human, while grotesque features start evolving:

His thighs had grown uncommonly wide and powerful, as well as hairy. Below the knee the hairiness came to a halt, and his legs narrowed into tough, bony, almost fleshless calves, terminating in a pair of shiny, cloven hoofs, such as one might find on any billy-goat. Saladin was also taken aback by the sight of his phallus, greatly enlarged and embarrassingly erect, an organ that he had the greatest difficulty in acknowledging as his own. 'What's this then?' joked Novak—the former 'Hisser'—giving it a playful tweak. 'Fancy one of us, maybe?' [...] 'no wonder he's so fucking *horny*.' (TSV 157).

In the extreme sense, Saladin not only experiences a humiliating treatment, but also becomes subjected to colonial practices, such as the fixation of the 'Other' through the colonizing gaze (against which Saladin's words have no power) and the disavowal of the black man's sexuality, as shown in the fascination with the penis.

The incident in the van—in particular the crude racism and brutality that is exercised on Saladin—can be seen as the backlash of his attempt to become English, as well as a sign of the ambivalence of a multiculturalism that officially celebrates difference, yet in the darkness inside a police van is quite far removed from such doctrines. Saladin is taken to a hospital, where there are other mutants just like him. In the middle of the night, he is woken up by a man with the head of a tiger:

'The point is, the manticore continued, 'are you going to put up with it?' Saladin was still puzzled. The other seemed to be suggesting that these mutations were the responsibility of—of whom? [...] 'They describe us,' the other whispered solemnly. 'That's all. They have the power of description' (TSV 168).

The magical metamorphoses of Saladin and the others, Rushdie seems to suggest, is a result of colonial discourse that stereotypes otherness and fixes it outside history and humanity. As Steven F. Walker suggests, “[i]n magical realist terms, metamorphosis is as common an event as racist stereotyping is in terms of traditional social realism” (351). This symbolism becomes a way of re-establishing ignored pieces of the puzzle that forms the history of Western civilization. The paradox of magical realism then is how it becomes the communicator of the real, thanks to its use of magical symbols.

3.2. Magical metaphors and the remaking of language

Looking at a narrative like *The Satanic Verses*, re-presentation of difference seems to come from the use of magic, and especially so through magical metaphors. Michael Gorra notes how “Rushdie’s work has always insisted on [...] the ‘metaphorical content’ of reality” (150). The fantastic and figurative language constructs its own, independent, discourse where identity can be re-thought. Rushdie says at one point: “do not ask your writers to create typical or representative fictions. Such books are almost invariably dead books. The liveliness of literature lies in its exceptionality” (qtd in Smale 151). Implied in the creation of fantastic and imaginary worlds (like Gibreel’s “tropicalization” of London) is also the creation, a very political one, of a site of struggle for the re-definition of culture—not as a site outside of the old culture, but from its inside. As Rushdie makes clear, Indian writers “can’t simply use the language in the way the British did; [...] it needs remaking for our own purposes” (*IH* 17). What I try to emphasize here is that this remaking and re-molding, must take the dominant language as its material and, working from there, mediate new identity between the contextual meaning, *i.e.* a discursive validation, and an articulation of culture that takes the form of flux and movement. This line of reasoning returns in Bhabha:

My shift from the cultural as an epistemological object to culture as an enactive, enunciatory site opens up possibilities for other ‘times’ of cultural meaning (retroactive, prefigurative) and other narrative spaces (fantasmic, metaphorical). My purpose in specifying the enunciative present in the articulation of culture is to provide a process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience. (255).

The moment of this ‘articulation,’ again, can be found in the space, the gap, provided by the ambivalence in the gaze of the colonizer. *The Satanic Verses* illuminates this hesitation as the condition of the migrant most clearly through Saladin, and in particular by way of his transformation into a beast—not only a result of the ‘Othering’ of Western discourse, but also of his naïve belief in the inclusiveness of the host country. The monstrosity of the situation is the limbo in which Saladin finds himself: a troublesome type of hybridity. In quite a contrast to Saladin’s situation however, is the tale of the exiled Imam. In the secluded space of a Kensington apartment, “frozen in time, translated into a photograph” (205), he keeps the blinds shut and obsessively drinks water to stay pure and unaffected by his surroundings, because in exile “all attempts to put down roots look like treason” (208).

For Saladin on the other hand, and for the transcultural condition itself, the untranslatable space becomes a new site of struggle. While hidden in the attic of Mishal Sufyan’s ‘Shaandaar Café,’ Saladin’s condition grows more and more acute. However, in the ambivalence of the hybrid space, bodies are nothing but the result of discursive formations; they are metaphors and they can change. As a consequence, the ‘devil’—Saladin’s curse and blame for his *naïveté*—turns into a local hero, admired and impersonated by children with toylike rubber horns, and also a symbol for the political resistance in the neighborhood (*TSV* 286). The fantastic transformation of a man into a devil carries with it a novelty, an originality that invites interpretation. As Bhabha

illustrates, in a technical yet illuminating passage describing the concept of reversing discursive ‘truths,’ meaning can be found “through the time-lag in-between the sign [...] and its initiation of a discourse or narrative” (263). *Before* a word (or a concept) has been assigned its (retrospective) place within a particular connotative formation, it lies “outside of the sentence” yet is also “contiguous with the sentence [...] not simply its anarchic disruption” (261-3). Now, this is what happens with Saladin; his figure is magically reversed from demonized to celebrated, with the capacity to write something *new*. By way of *cataphoresis*, i.e. the deliberate misuse of a metaphor, Saladin typifies a ‘deconstructive disloyalty’—what Spivak calls “seizing the apparatus of value-coding” (qtd in Bhabha 263). In recognizing this rebellious possibility for the marginalized community, Mishal Sufyan approaches Saladin with hopefulness and eager: “people can really identify with you. It’s an image white society has rejected for so long that we can really take it, you know, occupy it, inhabit it, reclaim it and make it our own” (*TSV* 287).

At the same time, Saladin would not find himself in this state if it wasn’t for the misunderstandings surrounding his citizenship—just one example of errors and confusion that shape the plot. What Slemon labels the ‘suspended dialectic’ of the trans-cultural space becomes in Rushdie’s narrative a feeling of being ‘lost in translation.’ Towards the end of the novel, Gibreel “wanders through a confusion of languages [...] Babylon” (459)—a city that is torn apart with pride and unwillingness to change. Throughout, static notions of identity, nationhood and language obstruct the creativity of plurality and newness. Labels and names contribute to this fixed world view, as Saladin also encounters from the police: “You’re a fucking Packy billy. Sally—who? – What kind of name is that for an Englishman?” (163). So, even if Saladin turns into a hero, the devil as metaphor materializes accidentally, as it grows out of nowhere and, following Spivak’s argument, is “without an adequate referent” (qtd in Bhabha 263).

Establishing the vague nature of the metaphor, however, does not invalidate its power. On the contrary, the deferral of meaning creates space for movement within the 'gap.' One interpretation of this capacity can be found through Eugene L. Arva's comparison of magical realism with Jean Baudrillard's notion of the 'hyperreal.' Unlike the indistinguishable nature of the signifier and the signified in the hyperreal, the magical realist metaphor *simulates* the effects of a "felt reality" (60) and by doing so, recreates a repressed past. Signification is not mimetic, but works "by imagination" (67). Yet, if we compare to a classic use of metaphor, Gregor Samsa's mutation into a bug in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, the magical realist narrative tries to reach that imagination through quite meticulous, material descriptions of the metaphor, whereas for Kafka, the most important aspect of that story was that "the insect itself cannot be depicted" (qtd in Bloom 49). This attitude springs from the fact that with magical realism, as opposed to expressionism of the 1930s, meaning is not shaped through a loss of language, but with the assurance that there is no separation between language and the reality it represents. Following Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle*, or Baudrillard's argument that the sign "masks the *absence* of a basic reality" (1736), everything is language and representation has no referent to which it could be false.

Yet, by way of its ontological basis, magical realism *has* a referent. It lies within a figurative interpretation of its meaning. Now, metaphors both "conceal their origins and stage themselves as true" (Jameson qtd in Arva 70) and, thus, the magical realist metaphor does more than just float in a postmodern abyss; it is "both medium and referent at the same time" (70). Most of all, the metaphors in *The Satanic Verses* are closely connected to their metamorphoses; they underline the shifting of form. David Punter argues that while metaphor shifts shapes, it "does so by reminding us of other shapes of things we have already known" (100). As such, the realization of metaphor may signify as Faris says 'beyond representation,' but it nevertheless implies a certain

repetition, or *déjà-vu*, alongside this change. Already at the beginning of *The Satanic Verses*, events are caught in a pattern of repetition: the aircraft, “a seed-pod giving up its spores” (4), blasts into a mimick of Nature’s creation; the ‘fallen angels’ of Gibreel and Saladin; and the condition of birth, not as something new, but as re-birth: “To be born again, [...] first you have to die” (TSV 3).

Conclusion

At the beginning of this essay, I set out with a question concerning the status of magic as the medium of postcolonial narratives. Through a description of the literary mode magical realism, I have argued that magic functions in a deconstructive way towards the Western realist tradition, and more importantly, fixed notions of identity, culture and the nature of the ‘real.’ In short, narratives of hesitation and ‘gaps’ call for new readings and understandings of the world. When cultures meet, a new and productive space emerges—not through what they have in common, but rather as a result of their clash and the movement that takes place ‘inbetween’ their boundaries. This space, in Bhabha called ‘hybridity,’ has been the focus of this study. Provoked through magical devices—in this text exemplified in Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*—the hybrid space is fluid and ambivalent, yet not without a name. The condition of *Being* in the inbetween carries with it a trace, a source that makes representation possible. In the case of *The Satanic Verses*, the shifting nature of the hybrid is portrayed through the use of metaphors and metamorphoses—magical tools that despite their mutability are based on historical and cultural references of the subaltern.

Hybridity highlights questions of innovation and change of form. The creation of newness—posed in the opening of *The Satanic Verses*: “[h]ow does newness come into the world? How is it born?” (8)—can be seen as the secret to the novel, and to the understanding of how cultures change. Hybridity generates newness, as it allows for

“new ways of seeing the world” (Walker 121). It is thus the ‘inter space’ of culture that gives movement birth. Innovation, moreover, is closely related to a sense of *play*. *The Satanic Verses* has a display of humoristic caricatures of people and events, and Rushdie says at one point that the novel “rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure” (qtd in Bhabha 121). *Jouissance* is according to Derrida an act of coming, as in coming for the first time. It is a case of ‘invention,’ of being born: someone new that breaks the order of things and therefore “presupposes some illegality” (*Psy* 312). Play, just like magic therefore, ruptures the static and challenges the fixed; it gives rise to newness within the gaps of the ambivalent and untranslatable.

Seeing the value of *jouissance*, I would like to conclude with a passage from *The Satanic Verses* in which this idea comes to light most clearly. When Saladin and the other mutants escape from the hospital in the nearby detention centre, they become reversed—from stereotyped and socially stigmatized into authors of their own emancipation. Breaking out means contesting the norms that keep subjects locked in their positions, and refusing docility. Instead, they ‘move across’ and disobey not only the boundaries of society but also of their own bodies:

There were many shadowy figures running through the glowing light, and Chamcha glimpsed beings he never could have imagined, men and women who were partially plants, or giant insects, or even, on occasion, built partly of brick and stone, there were men with rhinoceros horns instead of noses and women with necks as long as any giraffe. The monsters ran quickly [...] the manticore and other sharp-toothed mutants were waiting by the large holes they had bitten into the fabric of the containing fence, and then they were out, free, going their separate ways, without hope, but also without *shame*.” (*TSV* 171, my emphasis).

Freedom here takes the form of the monster, but within the playful signifier of magic and the fantastic metamorphoses of magical realism. Indeed, freedom is the *task* of

the monster: “each time an *event* has been produced, for example in philosophy or in poetry, it took the form of the unacceptable, or even of the intolerable, of the incomprehensible, that is, of a certain monstrosity” (*Pass* 387). These monsters signify the potential of a new tomorrow; the metamorphosed Saladin who runs out in the streets of London, not to assimilate, but to write something new: a difference that could lead to change, to a more dynamic sense of ‘multiculturalism.’

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