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**IDENTITY AND STORYTELLING IN SALMAN'S RUSHDIE SELECTED  
NOVELS**

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NOVELS**

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Man was the storytelling animal, the only creature on earth that told itself stories to understand what kind of creature it was. The story was his birthright,

and nobody could take it away.

Salman Rushdie, *Joseph Anton*

## Resumo

Baseada na ideia de que a escrita é uma repetição do estágio do espelho através da linguagem (Jacques Lacan), esta tese mostra que a contação de histórias proporciona ao narrador, ou ao contador de histórias, a oportunidade de repensar sua experiência de vida e construir uma nova camada de autoconhecimento em sua identidade. Esta tese analisa a relação entre a contação de histórias e a construção das identidades pessoais, coletivas e nacionais em quatro romances de Salman Rushdie: *Os Filhos da Meia-Noite*, *Haroun e o Mar de Histórias*, *O Último Suspiro do Mouro*, e *A Feiticeira de Florença*. Como os romances de Rushdie são usualmente considerados parte das literaturas pós-coloniais, eu uso os conceitos de Homi Bhabha sobre mimetismo, hibridismo e entrelugar para melhor entender os contadores de histórias dos romances citados acima como representações das identidades nacionais indianas.

Palavras-chave: Contação de histórias. Identidade. Hibridismo.

## Abstract

Based on Jacques Lacan's idea that writing is a repetition of the mirror stage through language, this dissertation argues that storytelling provides the narrator, or the storyteller, the opportunity to rethink his life experience and to build up another layer of self-knowledge in his/her identity. This dissertation analyzes the relation between storytelling and the construction of personal, collective, and national identities in four novels by Salman Rushdie: *Midnight's Children* (1981), *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008). As Rushdie's novels are usually considered part of postcolonial literatures, I use Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, hybridity, and in-betweenness in order to better understand the storytellers of the aforementioned novels as representations of Indian national identities.

Keywords: Storytelling. Identity. Hybridity.



## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	10
From Storytelling to Counter-Storytelling .....	12
On Postcolonial Identity.....	20
2. Rashid, the Storyteller in <i>Haroun and the Sea of Stories</i> .....	31
You Must Be a Subscriber: Rashid and the Stream of Stories.....	34
3. Saleem Sinai, the Mirror of the Nation in <i>Midnight's Children</i> .....	49
National Identities in Saleem's Counter-Narrative .....	53
Narrating the Self: Personal Identity in Saleem's Autobiography.....	68
4. Palimpsestic Identities in <i>The Moor's Last Sigh</i> .....	80
Morales' Palimpsestic Identity.....	89
Aurora's Counter-storytelling on Canvas .....	101
5. Collective Storytelling in <i>The Enchantress of Florence</i> .....	113
From Personal to Collective Memory .....	118
Collective Memory and Storytelling in <i>The Enchantress of Florence</i> .....	123
Akbar the Great: The Audience as the Arbiter of Stories .....	128
6. The Invented Self.....	134
The Self-Inventors.....	140
Created by Others.....	156
7. Conclusion .....	165
8. Works Cited .....	169

## Identity and Storytelling in Salman Rushdie's Selected Novels

### 1. Introduction

Being partially responsible for what we accept as reality, stories affect our understanding of the world, influence our opinion, and teach us to sympathize with others. Nevertheless, stories can be manipulated in order to maintain one's power over others and create ideologies that suppress the voices of the minorities. Stories can also serve as a weapon to challenge preconceptions that may not be fair to certain groups of people. When exposing social differences, stories can propose new ways to envision society. As Jonathan Culler advances, "Literature has been the possibility of fictionally exceeding what has previously been thought and written. For anything that seemed to make sense, literature could make it nonsense, go beyond it, transform it in a way that raised the question of its legitimacy and adequacy" (40). Taking that into consideration, it is possible to affirm that (counter-)stories offer a way out of sets of beliefs that discriminate a certain group of people. Counter-storytelling can become a mechanism to provide alternative interpretations of reality and may serve as a means to undermine inaccurate accounts about marginalized groups of society.

Most of Salman Rushdie's novels can be considered examples of counter-storytelling, for they have an insider's postcolonial perspective, which stands against a colonizer's generalizing point of view. Aside from providing a more accurate view of Indian history, culture, and tradition, Rushdie imbued his works with discussions on identity: Is there any proper definition of an Indian subject? That is one of the questions that the present work answers. The selection of novels for this dissertation includes four of his works: *Midnight's Children*, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and *The Enchantress of Florence*.<sup>1</sup> They were chosen for they deal with storytelling and identity implicitly: the

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<sup>1</sup> Salman Rushdie published a total of fourteen novels (1975-2019). Two of them were written for children: *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *Luke and the Fire of Life*.

characters themselves use storytelling as a technique to understand their own identity and the world around them.

Thus, the present dissertation discusses how storytelling contributes to the characters' construction of their identities and how it allows them to provide a counter-narrative that is not biased by stereotypical representations of their political and social statuses. By telling stories about themselves, the characters reflect on their background, deal with personal struggles, and create versions of their selves that are intended to suit their needs and aspirations. Ultimately, this line of thought enhances our views on Rushdie's construction of his characters as representatives of postcolonial subjects who have to deal with their fragmented and multicultural selves, and it emphasizes that storytelling, though an old practice, continues to endow people with power.

Because narratives are constantly influenced by one's culture, level of education, and social relationships (Bruner 4), it is crucial to analyze each one of the storytellers in the selection, their narrative techniques, audiences, and purposes. For instance, Saleem and Moraes mix historical events and fictional narratives that converge into what becomes the stories of their families.<sup>2</sup> Niccolò creates different stories to hide his own.<sup>3</sup> When he finally tells his story, it is not as accurate as he has known. As an artist, Aurora reimagines events while she portrays them in her paintings.<sup>4</sup> Rashid, the only professional storyteller in the selection, does not rely on fantasy when he is supposed to tell his life story.<sup>5</sup> These are some of the characters whose stories are analyzed in this work.

The summary of the novels and their critical legacy are provided in the beginning of chapters two, three, four, and five. Chapter two is dedicated to Rashid, the storyteller in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. This chapter also provides a commentary on storytelling as an

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<sup>2</sup> Saleem and Moraes are the narrators of *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Niccolò Vespucci is one of the main characters in *The Enchantress of Florence*.

<sup>4</sup> Aurora Zogoiby, Moraes' mother, is one of the main characters in *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

<sup>5</sup> Rashid is Haroun's father in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

oral practice. Chapter three focuses on Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*. It provides some definitions of the concept of nation, a discussion on the representation of national identities in the novel, and the analysis of Saleem's narrative as a written form of storytelling. Chapter four centers on aspects of hybridity in the formation of identity through Moraes and Aurora in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. This chapter comprises explanation of the connection between memory and storytelling, and the relation between the mirror stage and writing. Chapter five develops the correlation between storytelling and collective memory in *The Enchantress of Florence*. Chapter six advances the idea of the invented self by examining how one's identity can be forged through storytelling. Before the discussion of the novels, I provide an overview of two lines of theories that permeate the analysis of all the consecutive chapters: they are counter-storytelling and postcolonialism.

### From Storytelling to Counter-Storytelling

Long before there were books, when the human voice was the main vehicle of communication, people used stories to transmit knowledge to young generations and to warn listeners of possible dangers (Benjamin 106). Stories were principally based on a person's life (Benjamin 118) and contained personal and collective memories that, ultimately, helped create a sense of belonging within the community that shared them. Through storytelling, a group's history and cultural practices could be passed on to young generations. This practice guaranteed preservation and memory of a certain community (Devy 33).

Although storytelling is usually associated with adventures, fairy tales, and myths, the story of a person who has never left his/her homeland is equally worthy-telling (Benjamin 101). As Walter Benjamin puts forward, all stories are useful because of their potency to transmit some practical teaching, a moral, some advice or proverbs that the listener can apply to his/her life (105). Benjamin also highlights that the "counsel [given in a story] is less an

answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding” (105). In this sense, stories do not convey universal truths. They rather show the listeners the knowledge of a life in development.

According to Benjamin, storytelling as a communal practice has fallen in disuse because people are not interested in exchanging their experiences (99). People have lost their ability to communicate, assuming a passive attitude towards the crescent development of mass media (Benjamin 100). Narrative has, therefore, slipped from people’s everyday lives to written masterpieces, official history, news broadcasts, and the manipulated information produced by authorities, especially in what concerns economic, social, and war strategies (Benjamin 105). With the advent of the print, stories have been produced in written forms more often than in oral performances.

In a comparison between oral performances and novels, Benjamin explains that novels are dependable on the book, which disrupts the storyteller-listener diagram. In oral transmissions, the narrator tells his/her story to listeners who may also reproduce the same stories to others, becoming storytellers themselves. In contrast, readers, especially the ones who read novels, assume a passive position, for they are unable to express themselves, neither do they have any advice to tell (Benjamin 107). This statement may sound a little extreme, but it is undeniable that the role of the audience in oral performances and in the isolated task of reading a novel is different. Besides, Benjamin first published “The Storyteller” in 1968, long before the massification of social media. Nowadays, average people have used social media to share their readings or their own stories on blogs, on video platforms, in online book clubs, and in specialized websites for book reviews and recommendations. Although these practices do not reproduce the storyteller-listener diagram, they allow readers to engage with one another and share their responses.

Throughout history, stories have been used as entertainment, advice, warning, memoir, among others. In everyday life, narratives range from a friendly anecdote to advertising. They are part of our culture and are present in many types of oral performances and written texts, before bedtime, in stand-up comedies, in cinemas, in plays, and in storytelling sessions in schools and libraries. Stories show how people live and form their personal and group identities (Polletta et. al 112). They also constitute the (hi-)story of a nation, inasmuch as (counter-)narratives are used to create national myths and folklore and construct national identities. In this section, I briefly list some characteristics of oral storytelling that distinguish it from written storytelling. I also introduce a discussion on counter-storytelling that will permeate the subsequent chapters.

In oral storytelling, the speaker uses mnemonic devices that help him/her remember important information. Some examples are alliterations, assonances, antitheses, and patterned themes and characters (Ong 34). Oral stories also have many epithets, adjectives that characterize a certain group of people (Ong 38). In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, for instance, Rushdie plays with some epithetic formulas by challenging archetypes. One example is princess Batcheat,<sup>6</sup> who is not as beautiful and graceful as the princesses in the fairy tales are. Another device is the use of word and phrase repetitions that help the performer to have enough time to recall what comes next in the story (Ong 40). This characteristic is typical of oral cultures where one needs to memorize every piece of information in order to record it.

Moreover, oral storytelling is interactive and communal, that is, the speaker and the audience always share the same space. This proximity allows the speaker to have access to the audience's immediate reaction. Because of that proximity, a storyteller can use not only words, but also his body to convey his story. In artistic performances, stories are

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<sup>6</sup> Batcheat comes from the Hindi word *baat-cheet* that means chit-chat in English (*Haroun* 217).

accompanied with the narrator's facial expressions and body movements to enhance the audience's experience. As Walter Ong observes, in oral cultures the body is usually involved in a speaking activity (66). Stories can also be accompanied with songs and dance, becoming a more theatrical practice. Sometimes the performances are based on a previously written text, but it does not change the fact that the audience experiences those stories by listening to a narrator or to the characters of the tales.

In oral performances, the narrator is the mediator between the author and the audience, thus her/his role is more active than the author's is, because the narrator is the person who is present when the story is told (Cavarero 141). S/he is the connection between author and audience; s/he is the keeper of the stories. Through her/him, stories reach more people. Although the author is the creative mind behind a story, sometimes her/his story becomes more important than herself/himself. Most adults and children have listened to fairy tales, but not everyone can name the author(s) of those stories. Another example is Mary Shelley and her novel *Frankenstein*. As time passed, her name was shadowed by her character and the story became more famous than its author. Her yellow-skinned creature has remained in people's mind while her name was forgotten by most of the audience that consumes the numerous movies produced after her novel.

According to Albert B. Lord, every time a tale is told, it is re-created by the performer because even small changes in wording, rhythm or length alter the listeners' experience (160). As Lord has observed, not even the same narrator maintains the verbatim of a story over time (Lord 159). Besides, the audience's participation in the reconstruction of the story may also change its wording, but, at the same time, the listeners can help maintain the core of the story (65). Indeed, in oral cultures, it is more important to recall the formulas and themes of a tale than to remember it word by word. Each new performance becomes a new variation of the tale because it is repeatedly re-created by the narrator and the audience.

In contrast, Adriana Cavarero sees the narrator as a transmitter who always tells the story faithfully (141). She does not take into consideration the changes the narrator may make in the narrative. A professional storyteller probably maintains the core of a tale unaltered when retelling it, but a listener who decides to tell the same story may modify some details because s/he forgets some parts or wants to add more information to the narrative. A storyteller can, and sometimes should, adjust a story in order to reach a different kind of audience, when time is short or when s/he wants to adapt the story to a new context. Those changes produce several versions of the same tales. This particular characteristic highlights the capacity of stories to renew themselves and to generate more narratives. The storyteller, as Jerome Bruner advances, “may go beyond the conventional scripts, leading people to see human happenings in a fresh way, indeed, in a way they had never before ‘noticed’ or even dreamed” (12). In this manner, the storyteller’s role overlaps the figure of the author, and the teller becomes part of the creative process.

When telling a tale, the narrator should also think about the time and the place in which s/he tells his story, otherwise the narrative may be less effective (Polletta et. al 118). Hence, the teller has to consider factors that go beyond the plot, the characters, and the elements inside the narrative so that the story told is understood or causes the expected effect on the audience. As Francesca Polletta and colleagues put forward, as social performances, stories are subject to “hierarchies of cultural authority that [have] shaped the credibility of particular stories” (114). Thus, who speaks, to whom, where one speaks from, and how one does that are key elements of narratives, inasmuch as one’s position in society determines one’s point of view in relation to other people and the world as a whole (Brockmeier and Harré 48-50). As David Huddart explains, “Nations have their own narratives, but very often a dominant or official narrative overpowers all other stories, including those of minority



groups” (“The Nation” 68). In other words, a set of dominant narratives may undermine other stories, especially those of marginalized groups.

Those factors are usually taken into consideration in studies that represent people who were once deprived of broadcasting their own stories to the mainstream public because of their social positions.<sup>7</sup> With the advent and development of those studies, the peripheral subjects earned the opportunity to question the authority of the narratives that were not written by them or to them, but even so contained various assumptions about them. As Polletta and colleagues assert, “Even before movements have formed, ordinary people have told, retold, and collaboratively interpreted subversive stories in a way that has begun to build up a rich, variegated narrative common sense that is capable of competing with the hegemonic one” (122). For instance, the British portrayal of the colonies in the eighteenth century showed the colonized as savage people, which served as a justification for the cultural and political power of the Empire over the colonies.<sup>8</sup> When ex-colonials were empowered to speak for themselves, their stories became counter-narratives that were crucial for the construction of their personal and national identities and, consequently, those stories subverted and rectified the beliefs set by colonial discourse. In this sense, the benefits of counter-narratives are twofold: first, they challenge the prejudicial beliefs about minorities, set and spread through a single story told by the dominant group; second, they help marginalized groups to recognize themselves in literature. In sum, the main objective of counter-storytelling is to produce versions of reality in which every culture, people, or nation is respected.

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<sup>7</sup> Postcolonial studies are just one of the many examples of literary studies that propose a response to a dominant discourse. Other areas are also interested in the relation between dominant and peripheral discourses, such as Feminist, African-American, and Native-American studies.

<sup>8</sup> The Orientals were usually depicted as “irrational, depraved, (fallen), childlike, ‘different’” (Said, “The Scope of Orientalism” 40). The British governor, Lorde Cromer, who ruled Egypt for 25 years, affirmed that the Orientals were incapable of formulating logical sentences, reaching simple conclusions, or giving a consistent explanation of any event (Said, “The Scope of Orientalism” 38).

Counter-storytelling is a term usually associated to critical race theories that aim at understanding how mainstream stories portray Americans' views about race, and why those stories are still prominent. Critical race theories analyze how counter-stories help the audience reject standard stories and accept ones that are more inclusive. Usually seen as superior, the stories told by the dominant group maintain assumptions about marginalized groups that are used as justifications for the division between whites and blacks in America (Delgado, "Storytelling" 71). For Richard Delgado, the stories produced by marginalized groups counteract the prejudicial effects of the mainstream narratives ("Storytelling" 71). According to Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, counter-stories give the opportunity to many white North Americans to know the lives of black and/or hyphenated Americans in the United States (39). In this manner, those stories can approach the marginalized and the dominant group by challenging stereotypes and reminding "readers of our common humanity" (Delgado and Stefancic 43).

Delgado affirms that counter-stories promote discussions about discrimination that can lead to a change of attitude or, at least, to a reevaluation of a set of beliefs that condescend to minority groups ("Storytelling" 43). Counter-stories introduce the readers to "a new and unfamiliar world" and show them how life is different for other people (Delgado, "Storytelling" 64). Counter-stories "challenge the status quo" and set free "alternative versions of reality" by providing the marginalized groups with the means by which they will forge their voices (Delgado, "Storytelling" 72). Consequently, counter-stories defy prejudice and undermine the barriers that segregate people.

Furthermore, storytelling becomes a way to strengthen the ties among the members of marginalized groups. As Sandra Hughes-Hassell exemplifies, when black teens see themselves in a book character, they may increase the frequency of their reading, and they may eventually learn to appreciate their own culture (214). Through literature, marginalized

people(s) can know their historical background, share their experiences, comprehend their position in society, and make counter-stories of their own (214). Once stories are created and told inside the community, it is easier for a member of that community to identify with them.

Although counter-storytelling gives minority groups the opportunity to tell their life experience, it does not need to be a simple response to the dominant narrative; neither should it always be based on real stories and biographical accounts. Put differently, counter-stories do not have to be strictly realistic to bring awareness of social differences and to challenge the stories told by the dominant group. They can overcome this limitation and portray the traditions, dreams, and goals of the minority groups in a fictionalized manner, as we see in Rushdie's novels. By creating stories, marginalized subjects forge new realities that confront biased mindsets about them and, concurrently, make their audience more willing to accept and/or fight for social and political changes.

In postcolonial literature, counter-storytelling has produced a response to the monologic discourse about the colonial subjects while proposing new ways to imagine the ex-colonies as independent countries.<sup>9</sup> One important point to consider is that postcolonial discourse is generally thought in relation to the Empire, as a repetition with a difference or as a movement past colonialism. As Alastair Renfrew explains, “[N]o language is or ever has been entirely self-sufficient, insulated from the influence of other languages” (97), thus, even after colonialism, postcolonial works are subject to the impacts left by the dominance of the Empire on their culture and language, especially, when postcolonial authors choose to write in English. Counter-storytelling, in postcolonial literature, does not only write back to the Empire, but it also explores the multiplicity of the subjects found inside the ex-colonies and their diverse cultures, traditions, religions, and languages. Finally, postcolonial counter-

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<sup>9</sup> Monologism is centered on the author's perspective and/or on the ideologies of the Western culture that represent the voice of the Europeans (Lodge 128). For further information, see Mikhail Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel" p. 271.

storytelling is a manifestation of the cultures, national myths, and traditions of any given ex-colony and reflects the hybrid and bilingual consciousness of the ex-colonized people.

Literature reproduces daily life, but at the same time it is capable of producing new forms of seeing the world that may affect it. Nevertheless, it would be naïve to expect that storytelling per se would cause any effective change in the world. As Polletta and colleagues observe, it is difficult to eliminate dominant narratives even when they are false (119). It takes some time for a minority group's stories to be assessed as relevant as dominant narratives. Even so, minorities should insist on telling their own stories, for they will eventually reach more people and affect the way others see the world. Lastly, stories generate more stories and encourage other people to create their own narratives. They sprout like little seeds and become stronger as they are told repeatedly.

### On Postcolonial Identity

In the present doctoral dissertation, postcolonial criticism is of great interest because the selected novels compose, with other titles, a body of works that respond to colonial ideologies, promote anticolonial discourse, and deal with issues of postcolonial identity. Although the theoretical works mentioned here can be approximated to the practice of postcolonialism in many countries around the world, this overview focuses on the impact of British colonialism in the East, especially in India. What follows is a brief analysis of some of the points in postcolonial criticism that are fundamental to the reading of the selected works. They are orientalism, mimicry, hybridity, and the use of English language.

In "Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories," Edward Said defines colonialism as a branch of imperialism that consists of "the implanting of settlements on distant territory" ("Overlapping" 41). Imperialism, thus, refers to "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" ("Overlapping" 41). According to

Said, imperialism is a “struggle over geography,” a practice that controls the lands of other people and their tradition and cultures (“Overlapping” 38). In other words, imperialism, in all its forms, involves domination through political power and cultural hegemony. Said also remarks that the imperial period “has entered the reality of hundreds of millions of people, where its existence as shared memory and as a highly conflictual texture of culture, ideology, and policy still exercises tremendous force” (“Overlapping” 43). Although the colonial period has ended, its impacts are still felt by ex-colonies, mainly because imperialist relations have not ceased to exist.

In “The Scope of Orientalism,” Said maps the European representation of the Orient, mainly in the period raging from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. Orientalism was a tool to undermine and control the colonies, which were portrayed as inferior to European countries: “For Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (Said, “The Scope of Orientalism” 43). The message delivered to the Europeans was that the Westerners “are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the [Arab-Orientals] are none of these things” (Said, “The Scope of Orientalism” 49). In other words, the Europeans portrayed the Eastern people as dishonest, cruel, and savage whilst considering themselves as good, just, and moral. In this manner, the Occident sold the idea that they were kindly redeeming the Orient from its savageness. As most Europeans did not have the chance to experience the Orient, they ended up accepting those representations as true.

Those stereotypical representations of the colonies were used to justify the Empire’s domination over the Orient, inasmuch as they supposedly proved that the colonized did not have the capacity to govern themselves. As Homi Bhabha explains, the colonial discourse

seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledges of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. (*The Location* 101)

Based on this premise, the colonizers took control over the colony in order to reform the character of the colonials and to instill the European values into them. As Bhabha advances, “By ‘knowing’ the native population in these terms, discriminatory and authoritarian forms of political control are considered appropriate. The colonized population is then deemed to be both the cause and effect of the system, imprisoned in the circle of interpretation” (*The Location* 119). Accurate or not, those stereotypes sustained colonialism and imperialism for a long time.

Orientalism has endured so long because it has become a cultural hegemony that affected both sides of the equation (Said, Introduction 7). It authorizes discrimination and creates a separation between “we” and “they,” denying “the colonized the capacities of self-government, independence, Western modes of civility [and lending] authority to the official version and missions of colonial power” (Bhabha, *The Location* 118). Moreover, Orientalism limits the natives’ thoughts and shapes their culture. Due to the contact with Europeans, the colonized absorbed much of the Empire’s culture, language, habits, and values, especially among the upper classes of the colonies that adopted new habits, learnt a foreign language, and consumed imported goods.

The colonized were educated to become similar to the English people, but there was no intention to transform them into equals (Huddart, “Mimicry” 40). In order to sustain the gap, colonizers only distributed small portions of knowledge, which maintained the colonized in an inferior position in relation to the British (Bhabha, *The Location* 124). They became

intermediates between the lower classes and the Empire; they were not considered as “savages” as the other natives, but they never reached the same status as the Europeans. However, by persuading the upper classes to assimilate British values, the colonizers indirectly decreased the differences between both parties and made it harder to maintain their power, once their presence seemed to be less justifiable.

This partial representation of the colonizers, also called mimicry, is an exaggerated manifestation of the colonizers’ behavior and language. It is a “repetition with difference,” containing tones of mockery (Huddart, “Mimicry” 39). Bhabha explains that mimicry reflected “a desire for a reformed, recognizable other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite*” (Bhabha, *The Location* 122). In other words, mimicry is an externalization of the desire for power associated with the figure of the colonizer. Bhabha advances that “[u]nder cover of camouflage, mimicry, like the fetish, is a part-object that radically revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history. For the fetish mimes the forms of authority at the point at which it deauthorizes them” (*The Location* 130). In this sense, mimicry provides colonials with means to question the legitimacy of the British presence in the colony. It produces a class of people who are able to imagine their homeland as an independent nation, freed from the strings of colonialism. Mimicry, therefore, represents “an act of subverting colonial discourse by exploiting the ambivalence at its heart, its unstable, contradictory, non-identical potentiality” (Castle, “Mimicry” 404). As a result, mimicry generated hybrid subjects that destabilized colonial power and indirectly confronted the Empire’s reasons to maintain control over the colony.

In postcolonial studies, the term hybridity refers to the subjects, found in-between cultures, who submitted themselves to a dominant power while maintaining their traditions or, as Gregory Castle defines it, hybridity is “the multitude of subject positions and identities in colonial and, especially, postcolonial societies” (“Hybridity” 400). Those hybrid subjects

are the product of encounters among nations, be they through colonization, diaspora, migration, and so on. Hybridity generates a double consciousness: the state of participating in two distinguished cultures, a subject divided between his own local culture and the culture of the Empire (Goldberg 78).

The term “double consciousness” first appears in W. E. B. Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folks* to define the struggle of African Americans to construct their identities. As Du Bois puts it, white North Americans do not allow African Americans to see themselves without the mask of their world: “a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (31). In other words, African Americans’ identities are shaped by white North Americans’ views about them. In this manner, double consciousness means to see “one’s self through the eye of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois 31). As the mainstream discourse is already internalized in the minority groups, this double vision is a consequence of unequal political relations. For Du Bois, blacks should seek reconciliation by merging their “double self into a better and truer self” (32). In sum, hybridity produces a third element, a repetition with a difference, a palimpsestic subject.<sup>10</sup>

In this doctoral dissertation, hybridity is used as the encounters of the Empire and ex-colonized subjects. After years of colonialism, the indigenous people became hybrid subjects, inasmuch as their identities are modified by the colonizers’ habits, culture, and language. As Bhabha notices, when Indians were exposed to Catholicism, they adapted some religious practices to their local beliefs (*The Location* 171). Hindus, for instance, refused to take the Eucharistic, because it represented Christ’s body and many Hindus do not to eat meat. Even after independence, the relations with the Empire are not totally eliminated. The encounters

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<sup>10</sup> Palimpsest is a practice in visual arts that consists of a work being painted over another one. In literature, it refers to works that transform or imitate previous texts.



continue to exist through neocolonialist strategies that maintain economic dependency between the First and the Third world countries. Instead of resisting the dominant power with violence, hybrid subjects usually adapt themselves into an ambivalent form.

Hybridity is a complex issue because it has been the reason for both celebration and resistance. It can be seen as the product of multiple cultures, which enriches the country, but it can also exclude from society those who are not “pure,” if such a thing exists nowadays: “in the nineteenth century the concept of hybridity represented dominant concerns that white or European-based purity, power, and privilege would be polluted, and in being polluted diluted” (Goldberg 79). In the present work, hybridity is seen as a celebration of the miscegenation of cultures, a way out of the binary opposition of colonizers/colonized, center/periphery, mainly because this concept opens a space between cultures where differences can coexist without generating points of conflict.

Another element concerning postcolonial identity is its relation to the language of the Empire. In the end of the eighteenth century, England saw colonies as a resource; consequently, they intervened very little in Indian culture and tradition (Teverson, *Salman* 30). Eventually, some humanists and religious groups recommended the English education for the high social class (Teverson, *Salman* 31). Rushdie was educated by those standards both in his country and overseas. As Anthony Appiah explains, in “Topologies of Nativism,” colonial education in general was an effective tool to tame the colonized, inasmuch as it “produced a generation immersed in the literature of the colonizers, a literature that often reflected and transmitted the imperialist vision” (947). Similarly, Gaurav Desai explains that English literary works presented “a lesson in morality, gentility, and ideal civility as it was exhibited by the best of the English literary tradition” (524). Hence, language contributed a great deal to the formation of hybrid subjects. After independence, Indians continued using and modifying the English language. They also started to study works by Indian authors in

schools. Eventually, English Indian works written for and about the East gained more prominence inside and outside colonies. Nevertheless, it remains controversial whether English is an appropriate language to convey postcolonial ideas. For Appiah, Rivkin and Ryan, and other critics that are mentioned below, English is an effective tool to connect ex-colonies to the rest of the world and, therefore, it should be used by postcolonial subjects in their self-representation process.

Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan classify English as a “lingua franca,” used for global communication by native and non-native speakers. However, during the colonial period, English was used to instill British values into the colonials and to instruct the local population so that they could work for the local administration (1071). Considering the first case, it is possible to affirm that the use of English allows Indian novels to go beyond the borders of the country (Teverson, *Salman* 133). The language previously used to prevent the colonies from having their own cultural identities has now been adapted to other purposes and been adopted in many Indian postcolonial novels. In “Imaginary Homelands,” Rushdie comments that using English to tell stories about India is a way to appropriate the English language and to strive for freedom from the forceful strings of colonization:

[W]e can't simply use the language in the way the British did . . . it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies.

To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free. (17)

The in-between location of hybrid subjects is highlighted by their use of the English language, which differs from the colonizer's. For British Indian writers, the use of English is not optional because it is the language of their current home (Rushdie, “Imaginary” 17).

Thus, the fusion of the English language with Indian languages becomes part of the construction of identities of those who remain in the country and those who live outside their homeland.

Another important point is the change in the view toward the use of the English language in India. During colonialism, English became the language used by highly educated social classes. For that reason, English fluency was synonymous with “upward social mobility and heightened status” (Sen 669). However, for younger generations, who have learnt English since their childhood, English does not have an oppressive connotation, as it had for the generations that experienced colonialism (Sen 660). For post-independence generations, English has become their language, together with their native languages (Sen 660). English unites the different languages found in India and connects it to the Western world (Sen 660).

Nevertheless, Indian English differs from the British standard, for it contains its own characteristics. The sentence organization mirrors Indian languages, there are plenty of word repetitions (to express intensity and plurality) and a constant use of archaic vocabulary (Sen 665-660). For the last seventy years or so, English has been “an Indian language independently of the presence of British rulers” (Teverson, *Salman* 34). The English spoken in India has been modified since it was first adopted as an official language. This adaptation of the English language demonstrates that it became part of Indian culture and, thus, it is a paramount element in the construction of Indians’ identities. Rushdie’s works, for example, demonstrate how language is fluid and capable of adapting to different contexts and users. In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, the fluidity of language becomes vivid in the metaphor of the ocean as the source of all stories. In *Midnight’s Children*, Saleem’s sentences consist of long word-connections, which also point to the fluidity of the text. Be it in spoken language or in

literature, Indian English became independent from the Empire by borrowing some characteristics from other languages spoken in India.

Andrew Teverson has argued that “Rushdie’s fiction does not reflect the successful appropriation of English but is a fiction of the failure of English” because Rushdie, and other Indian writers as well, has modified English so that it reflects the lexical and the syntax of the languages found in India (*Salman* 37). Teverson has also noticed that Rushdie’s novels utilize the dynamic rhythm of Indian speakers (it is fast and has no pauses), use a comedic and ironic tone, and do not follow any pattern in punctuation (sometimes it is excessive, other times it does not appear). In addition, Rushdie’s novels allude to texts from Eastern and Western cultures, to different literary genres, and to popular media (*Salman* 42). As Teverson highlights,

Rushdie is seeking, willfully and self-consciously to place elements of the Euro-American novelistic tradition in new conjunctions with elements of the Indian (or Arabic) storytelling tradition in order, firstly, to see how one tradition might productively transform the other and, secondly, to show how fictions have been brought into new hybrid relations in his own experience, as a migrant intellectual working in increasingly globalised, post-colonial arenas. (*Salman* 47)

Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is an example of the encounter of Indian orality with the English novel form. Following Indian oral storytelling tradition, the novel has a non-linear plot: full of digressions, extra comments, reminiscences, repetitions, and self-conscious moments while using a Western genre.

Even though the novel rose in England, its innovative features allowed postcolonial voices to express themselves in their own ways, without the need to reproduce classical traditions. According to Terry Eagleton, the novel has become “the most hybrid of literary forms, a space in which different voices, idioms and belief-systems continually collide” (6).

In Rushdie's case, the novel and the English language are, as Teverson puts forward, "a point of departure" from which Rushdie imprints his personality, defends his beliefs, and renews old stories:

[F]or Rushdie the writer fuses anterior forms of saying with his or her own culturally, historically, politically distinctive outlook to create a third thing that, though it comes from somewhere, is not identical to the point of departure. Such a conception of the author as a figure capable of forging new ways of seeing the world is crucial to anti-colonial writing in which it is essential to the author of resistance that he or she is able to speak and think differently to the ways in which he or she has been spoken and thought in the past. (*Salman* 57)

Novels are an important genre to postcolonial narratives for their ability to rethink the past and to generate new forms of restructuring literature, language, and the world to which they refer and help to create.

Postcolonial novels are constantly imagining new representations of the nation and forging a fictional space where national identities can be negotiated. As Bhabha puts it, "The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects" (*The Location* 209). Although national narratives can occur in distinct media, they find in literature, especially in novels, more space for development, examination, confrontation, and reinvention. In novels, the daily lives of anonymous people can be known by other members of their imagined community, which contributes to the process of self-recognition and identification.

In conclusion, postcolonial literature seeks to subvert the discourse of the Empire while it forges new realities that are freed from orientalist stereotypes. However, "decolonization is process, not arrival" and it involves a constant negotiation between the

European discourse that has dominated the Third World for centuries and the local postcolonial texts (Tiffin 95). As Helen Tiffin advances, “Post-colonial counter-discursive strategies involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified ‘local’” (98). By telling counter-stories, postcolonial subjects defy the prejudice established by the pedagogical works written by the Empire and, at the same time, imagine arrangements of society that are more inclusive. Considering that, the present dissertation proposes a reading of the selected novels as counter-narratives that challenge colonial stereotypes and develop multiple forms of Indian identities. The following chapters demonstrate that counter-storytelling can help peripheral subjects to rethink and recreate how the world sees them and, most importantly, how they see themselves.

## 2. Rashid, the Storyteller in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

Published in 1990, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is Rushdie's fifth novel and the first written for children. The novel is abundant with references to literary texts, pop culture, and movies. It contains allusions to classical works, such as *Alice in Wonderland* (Haroun 150), *Heart of Darkness* (Haroun 138, 145), and to Eastern literature, such as the *Kathasaritsagara*, the *Thousand and One Nights*, the *Panchatantra*, the *Hamzanama* and the *Adventures of Hatim Tai* (Rushdie, Joseph 19). All those stories helped Rushdie design his imaginary land in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

Interestingly, the idea of the Ocean of the Stream of Story refers to one of those traditional Indian stories, the *Kathasaritsagara* (the Story-Stream Sea), a collection of stories assembled by Somadeva in the eleventh century A.D (Rushdie, Joseph 167). Rushdie's father, Anis, used to tell those tales to his son during bedtime story sessions. Years later, Rushdie told the same narratives to his son Zafar, to whom the novel is dedicated. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is, therefore, filled with references to the stories Rushdie heard in his childhood in India.

The novel tells the story of Haroun in his journey to Kahani, a moon that shelters the Ocean of the Streams of Story. Haroun lives with his parents, Soraya and Rashid Khalifa, in a sad city that has forgotten its name. One day, Soraya gets tired of Rashid's made-believe stories and decides to flee with their neighbor Mr. Sengupta, who is a serious man with no imagination (Haroun 22). Her departure makes Rashid as sad as the city he lives in, which makes him lose his gift of telling stories. Then, Haroun embarks on an adventure to Kahani in order to restore his father's subscription to the Sea of Stories. In Kahani, the invisible second moon of Earth, Haroun and Rashid<sup>11</sup> help the people of Gup City fight against the Cultmaster

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<sup>11</sup> Haroun and Rashid are named after Haroun al-Rashid, a character in *The Arabian Nights* (Haroun 218).

Khattam-Shud, who is poisoning the Ocean of the Streams of Story.<sup>12</sup> Eventually, Haroun succeeds in restoring his father's subscription and Rashid becomes able to tell tales again.

*Haroun and the Sea of Stories* brings forward the role of storytelling in one's identity through the storyteller Rashid, whose identity is dependable on his profession, and through the people of the Valley of K, who are empowered as a community by Rashid's stories. The novel also shows that listening to other peoples' stories is the first step towards accepting the differences that make us human.

If *Midnight's Children* represents Rushdie's version of India centered on the first years of independence, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* represents India in his childhood or, at least, it is a portrayal of India through the eyes of a child. Suchismita Sen has noticed that there are many references to India in the novel. Haroun's house, for instance, mirrors the ones found in a typical middle-class neighborhood (Sen 663). The comic sentences in the back of the vehicles, the passengers arguing on the bus, and the use of Indian English (word repetition, archaic vocabulary, and excessive use of continuous tense) are other similar characteristics (Sen 663-64). All those elements help a common reader visualize India and evoke in the minds of Indians the memory of their childhood.

Following the traditional hero-quest motif, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* portrays Haroun's journey "from disbelief into belief," which represents a "movement from distrust in literature to confidence in its power" (Baena 69). The question "what's the use of stories that aren't even true" (*Haroun* 20) proves to be extremely complex, especially because the novel reflects on "double identity, life as a story, the boundaries of fiction, the artist's imagination, intertextuality, the sources of stories, multiculturalism, the mixture of high and popular culture" in order to answer that question (Baena 70). The author's political agenda is incorporated into the novel by using elements of a fable that, as Maria Biscaia states, does not

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<sup>12</sup> Khattam-Shud means "completely finished" (*Haroun* 218).



have a definite moral (242). According to Biscaia, Rushdie uses stories “to open people’s eyes but not to indicate a definitive action mode” (242). By presenting a story that is assuredly imaginative, Rushdie deals with political issues more effectively than those whose speech is filled with “supposed” (or so-called) facts do.

Other authors, such as Mark McDannald and Andrew Teverson, read *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* as a form of resistance against the censorship writers may face. As an example, they mention Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, which was banned from many countries due to its allusions to the Quran and the prophet Mohammed. Being the first work written after the fatwa, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* parallels Rushdie’s life and praises the importance of storytelling “as a form of ideological assertion and resistance” (Biscaia 244). Similarly, Teverson argues that the main objectives of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* are to defend the value of “freedom of speech and personal liberty” and to present a retaliation against oppression and censorship (“Fairy Tales” 446). Storytelling should be “the antithesis of totalitarian thinking” by permitting listeners to interpret stories in their own way, without imposing a previously fixed understanding (Teverson, “Fairy Tales” 449). In this manner, oral and written storytelling becomes a beneficial practice for those who have been silenced by oppressive regimes or have been excluded from mainstream society for their skin color, ethnicity, gender or social status.<sup>13</sup> By sharing their personal stories, people can work together in order to create a better community. Those narratives may eventually become part of a tradition, inasmuch as they represent the beliefs and struggles of a certain group.

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<sup>13</sup> Illiteracy can also be included in this list, for it is related to social and economic inequalities. According to UNESCO, 773 million adults were still illiterate in 2019 (1). Despite the crescent growth in the literacy rates, the number of people who lack literate skills or who are functionally illiterate is high. Hence, orality is one of the main means these people use to express themselves. As Walter Ong has observed, although oral cultures “produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth,” literacy allows people to develop their human consciousness, history, science, and philosophy (14), especially because people can use writing to express complex thoughts and ideas (7).

You Must Be a Subscriber: Rashid and the Stream of Stories

According to Walter Benjamin, the storyteller, in his original form, has become extinct because people have lost the ability to tell stories, especially the ones based on their own experiences (99).<sup>14</sup> Instead, people read novels that are usually so long that cannot be told without losing most of its content (Benjamin 114). Benjamin also affirms that the well written stories do not differ much from the ones told by a storyteller (101). The novels in the present study, for example, maintain several characteristics of oral storytelling. Some examples are the use of word repetitions and the unconventional use of punctuation that imitate Indian orality by setting a rapid reading rhythm. Those devices are evident in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and in *Midnight's Children*. By incorporating traditional Indian narratives (and their storytelling styles) into his novels, Rushdie modifies the novel form and echoes oral storytelling.

In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, the storyteller continues to be an important figure. Although Rashid is not the protagonist of the novel, his inability to tell stories initiates Haroun's journey. His job as a storyteller comprehends a great portion of his life. Despite living in a sad city, Rashid is a happy and creative man who uses storytelling even when he is not performing. He never gives simple answers to Haroun's questions. He prefers to tell imaginative anecdotes instead. When Haroun asks his father why they did not have more children, Rashid answers: "We used up our full quota of child-stuff in making you . . . It's all packed in there, enough for maybe four-five kiddies. Yes, sir, more to you than the blinking eye can see" (*Haroun* 19). On the other hand, Soraya tells Haroun that they have tried but have not succeeded, at least not up to the end of the story.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to highlight that Walter Benjamin speaks from a Western perspective. However, oral tradition is still practiced by groups within Western society or in countries where a great portion of the population is illiterate. In the present work, both oral and written forms of storytelling are of equal importance.

<sup>15</sup> Rushdie wrote another book for children that shows Luka, Rashid's second son, in search of the fire of life in order to save his father. Once more Rashid is saved by one of his sons.

Rashid's success as a storyteller is largely due to his subscription to the Stream of Stories, the source of all captivating narratives. According to Iff, the Water Genie responsible for subscriptions, "[a]nybody can tell stories . . . Liars, and cheats, and crooks, for example. But for stories with that Extra Ingredient, ah, for those, even the best storytellers need the Story Waters. Storytelling needs fuel, just like a car; and if you don't have the Water, you just run out of Steam" (*Haroun* 58). Because of its fantastical source, Rashid's stories guarantee claps of joy at the end of each session.

As Haroun perceives during his journey, many of the stories told by Rashid are real, or at least, more real than Haroun has ever imagined. One example is "The Tale of the Moody Land," "the story of a magical country that changed constantly, according to the moods of its inhabitants" (*Haroun* 47-48). In the beginning of their journey, Rashid and Haroun travel on the Dull Lake, which is as moody as the place described in Rashid's tale. Another example is Kahani, where Haroun finds many characters from the stories he listens to, such as Iff and Hoopoe. Indeed, the boundary between reality and fiction becomes a blur as Haroun's journey advances. Haroun concludes that "the real world was full of magic, so magical worlds could easily be real" (*Haroun* 30). Eventually, the differences between the real and the fictional worlds seem to be unimportant.

Rashid's gift to tell stories is not solely dependable on the Stream, since he becomes unable to perform long before he cancels his subscription. As the novel tells, "[W]ith all his rehearsals and performances, Rashid was so often on stage that he lost track of what was going on in his own home. He sped around the city and the country telling stories, while Soraya stayed home, turning cloudy and even a little thunderous and brewing up quite a storm" (*Haroun* 16). When Rashid sees himself abandoned by his wife, he does not feel motivated to tell stories, and his gift starts to disappear: "Rashid Khalifa, the legendary Ocean of Notions, the fabled Shah of Blah, stood up in front of a huge audience, opened his mouth,

and found that he had run out of stories to tell” (*Haroun* 22). His marital problem makes him forget the stories and causes some embarrassment. In his first performance after the separation, Rashid “opened his mouth, and . . . found that it was as empty as his heart” (*Haroun* 26). If he does not remember any stories, his days as a professional storyteller will soon end.

Despite being a storyteller, Rashid is unable to create stories about himself. When telling his personal story, Rashid does not rely on fiction; he is totally honest about his current situation. Even when he is questioned about his unhappiness, he is unable to avoid mentioning his marital problems. Therefore, Rashid can be considered a reliable storyteller, inasmuch as he cannot create stories for his own benefit. Indeed, people believe more in Rashid’s fiction than in the promises of politicians. Because of that, Rashid is esteemed by the candidates who want to obtain the storyteller’s support:

It was well known that if you could get Rashid’s magic tongue on your side then your troubles were over. Nobody ever believed anything a politico said, even though they pretended as hard as they could that they were telling the truth. (In fact, this was how everyone knew they were lying.) But everyone had complete faith in Rashid, because he always admitted that everything he told them was completely untrue and made up out of his own head. So the politicos needed Rashid to help them win the people’s votes. (*Haroun* 20)

Rashid plays a decisive role in the political sphere because of his good reputation as a storyteller. However, he does not seem to understand the importance of his job when he agrees to support Mr. Buttoo, the main candidate in the remote Valley of K, who is not well esteemed by the citizens of that city: “Mr. Buttoo and his party (which now included Rashid and Haroun) were permanently surrounded by exactly one hundred and one heavily armed soldiers; and such ordinary people as Haroun noticed on the street wore extremely hostile

expressions” (*Haroun* 42). Haroun perceives that Mr. Buttoo is not a good candidate and tries to reason with his father, but Rashid does not listen to him. To a certain extent, Rashid’s becoming unable to tell stories prevents him from supporting Mr. Buttoo without further consideration.

In the Valley of K, aboard *Arabian Nights Plus One*, Haroun unexpectedly encounters Iff, the Water Genie, who is about to disconnect Rashid’s supply to the Ocean of Stream of Stories. Then, Haroun blackmails the Water Genie to take him to Kahani so that he could reestablish his father’s subscription. In Kahani, Haroun finds the Ocean of the Streams of Story, which seems a complex arrangement of thousand currents in different colors. As Iff explains,

Different parts of the Ocean contained different sorts of stories, and as all the stories that had ever been told and many that were still in the process of being invented could be found here, the Ocean of the Streams of Story was in fact the biggest library in the universe. And because the stories were held here in fluid form, they retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories and so become yet other stories; so that unlike a library of books, the Ocean of the Streams of Story was much more than a storeroom of yarns. It was not dead but alive.

(*Haroun* 72)

The union of different streams together create a new story, which is not a copy of the anterior ones, but a third story. As Julia Kristeva explains, “[A]ny text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (66). In this sense, stories are not purely original, but they are an amalgamation of references and ideas. Through the Ocean of the Stream of Story, Rushdie highlights the capacity of storytellers to renew old tales by re-imagining them in a new context.

While traveling in the waters of the Ocean of Stream of Stories, Iff explains to Haroun that Kahani is divided into two by the Twilight Strip. On the southern side of the strip, lie the Land of Chup and its inhabitants, the Chupwalas,<sup>16</sup> who live in Perpetual Night. In the North, the Guppees live in Eternal Sunshine in the Land of Gup.<sup>17</sup> When Haroun arrives in Gup City, it is filled with excitement, for Guppees are preparing to go to war against Chupwalas and their Cultmaster Khattam-Shud, who are poisoning the Sea of Stories. Rashid describes Khattam-Shud as “the Arch-Enemy of all Stories, even of Language itself. He is the Prince of Silence and the Foe of Speech” (*Haroun* 39). Although Khattam-Shud is not described as a good fellow, he is considered an ordinary element of life and stories. However, as the narrative develops and Rashid meets Khattam-Shud, his portrayal acquires an alarming tone:

[T]he Land of Chup has fallen under the power of the ‘Mystery of Bezaban’, a Cult of Dumbness or Muteness, whose followers swear vows of lifelong silence to show their devotion . . . In the old days the Cultmaster, Khattam-Shud, preached hatred only towards stories and fancies and dreams; but now he has become more severe, and opposes Speech for any reason at all. (*Haroun* 101)

The censorship imposed by Khattam-Shud has reached extreme levels, becoming a threat for all sorts of speech. The Cultmaster represents the Empire’s imposition of European culture and languages in the colonies, disregarding the pre-existent population’s characteristics.

At a first glance, Chupwalas stand for oppression, for their vow of silence and for the poisoning of the streams of stories in their fight against oral speech. Nevertheless, as Eva König suggests, that version of the story reflects Guppees’ point of view and undermines their responsibility as the core of the problem (55). When Guppees use their advanced

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<sup>16</sup> Chupwala means quiet fellow (*Haroun* 217).

<sup>17</sup> Gup means gossip or nonsense (*Haroun* 218).

technology to stop the moon from rotating, they condemn Chupwalas to live in eternal darkness. Hence, Guppees assume an imperialist position in relation to Chupwalas.

From this point of view, Guppees represent Europe, their technological knowledge, and language, whereas Chupwalas represent the colonies: first, because Chupwalas live in the South of the moon and, second, because their language is considered inferior to the language of the Land of Gup (König 59). Interestingly, the geography of Haroun's homeland mirrors the division found in Kahani: "In the north of the sad city stood mighty factories in which (so I'm told) sadness was actually manufactured, packaged and sent all over the world, which never seemed to get enough of it" (*Haroun* 15). Once more, the north represents the source of sadness and destruction, and it stands as a metaphor for European colonialist and imperialist operations.

Thus, the main conflict in Kahani is summarized in the word segregation. Guppees' stereotypical portrayal of Chupwalas creates a barrier between them, which, up to a certain point, influences Haroun's point of view and misleads him to believe in Guppees' version of the narrative. Comparatively, the monologic discourse of Empire creates stereotypes that do not allow modifications. Bhabha explains:

The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations. (*The Location* 107)

The portrayal of Chupwalas through the eyes of Guppees does not depict the former properly and deprives both parties of the opportunity to know each other. This allegorical representation of colonial relations shows how stereotypes oversimplify the cultural complexity of the colonies and perpetrate misrepresentations of colonial subjects over time.

By being aware of the superficiality of binary oppositions, one may realize that Chupwalas and Guppees are more intricate than that.

The novel shows that the separation is rather an imposition of the authorities than the desire of the population of Kahani. For instance, Guppees are attracted by darkness, whereas Chupwalas, who fear the Cultmaster, do not want to be in eternal silence. Interestingly, the first to reject that binary opposition is Haroun. Through Mudra, a Chupwala warrior, Haroun knows both sides of the story and, then, starts questioning Guppees' attitude toward Chupwalas.<sup>18</sup> Haroun's ability to envision a united Kahani hints at the potentiality of younger generations to rethink the world as a multicultural space where cultural differences are welcome.

When Haroun first sees Mudra, he gets impressed by how the warrior and his shadow can move independently from each other. Those movements are actually a language of gestures that involves not only hands but also the movements of feet and facial expressions. According to Haroun, Mudra's movements look like "a dance of great beauty and grace, a dance danced in perfect silence, because the music was playing inside the dancers' heads" (*Haroun* 124). Haroun also notices that "[t]he Shadow was attached to the warrior at the feet, but other than that seemed to be entirely free. It was as though its life in a land of darkness, of being a shadow concealed in shadows, had given it powers undreamt of by the shadows of a conventionally lit world. It was an awesome sight" (*Haroun* 124). In the land of Chup, shadows are partially independent from their human beings. In a postcolonial light, the image of Mudra and his Shadow can be analyzed as a division within the self. In König's view, Chupwalas and their Shadows are "the two conflicting self-images of the colonized and the postcolonial subject" (61). That unique characteristic is a metaphor for the presence of the

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<sup>18</sup> Mudra is named after one of the gestures of Abhinaya, the language of gesture used in Indian classical dance (*Haroun* 217-218). It is also a gesture of the hands in ceremonies, dances, and visual arts in Buddhism and Hinduism ("Mudra").



Empire that, even after independence, continues to influence ex-colonies through cultural products and commercial activities.

Mudra wants to reconcile with Guppees and reestablish peace, which he eventually does. Through Mudra, Haroun learns that silence and speech should coexist, for both are complementary elements, and he concludes that Chupwalas and Guppees would have a friendly relationship if they started praising their differences, instead of despising them. This is one of the main objectives of the story: to show that prejudices prevent people from truly knowing one another.

On the role of prejudice in textual interpretation, Hans-Georg Gadamer affirms that a reader should police his/her own expectations towards the meaning of a text (289). As every person has within herself/himself a body of knowledge, traditions, and opinions, s/he uses these fore-conceptions whenever s/he reads a text. This repertoire helps readers predict the meaning of a given text, but it may also prevent them from truly understanding the meaning implied in the text (Gadamer 288). Gadamer explains:

A person trying to understand something will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings, ignoring as consistently and stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagines it to be. Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. (289)

By recognizing their own fore-meanings, readers are open to understand what the text means and, then, they can resignify their own pre-conceptions and prejudices when necessary. In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Guppees and Chupwalas cannot understand one another because they are reluctant to renounce their prejudices towards the other party.

During the battle between Chupwalas and Guppees, Rashid, the storyteller, accumulates the role of a translator since he is the only one that speaks *Abhinaya*, the

language of gesture spoken by Mudra. The translation facilitates the reconciliation between Guppees and Chupwalas. Here, Rashid illustrates the role of a storyteller/translator as a bridge between nations that promotes cross-cultural interaction and approaches people from different backgrounds. In this process, the translator reproduces what Bhabha calls a Third Space, a place where the purity of cultures fades, and hybrid identities are constructed through negotiation. As Bhabha puts it,

[T]he theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. (*The Location* 56)

In this Third Space, the translator performs the act of cultures through languages, dismantles the polarity between two opposing societies, and enables people to negotiate their identities and their relation with others. It is therefore not surprising that Rashid accumulates the roles of a storyteller and a translator, inasmuch as both functions take up the responsibility of transmitting other people's realities.

After the battle in the Twilight Strip, Khattam-Shud is defeated, the Ocean is saved, and harmony is restored between Guppees and Chupwalas. Rashid's subscription is reestablished, which enables him to tell stories again, and they leave Kahani. When they find themselves aboard *Arabian Nights Plus One* again, it is time for Rashid to perform for the citizens of the Valley of K. Nevertheless, he decides not to tell the stories Mr. Buttoo wants him to. Instead, he tells the story that serves as the title to the novel, a story about his son and his recent adventure:

Whenever Rashid was talking about Khattam-Shud and his henchmen from the Union of the Zipped Lips, the whole audience stared very hard at Snooty Buttoo and *his* henchmen, who were sitting behind Rashid on the stage, looking less and less happy as the story unfolded. And when Rashid told the audience how almost all the Chupwalas had hated the Cultmaster all along, but had been afraid to say so, well, then a loud murmur of sympathy for the Chupwalas ran through the crowd, *yes*, people muttered, *we know exactly how they felt*. And after the two falls of the two Khattam-Shuds, somebody started up a chant of ‘Mister Buttoo – go for good; Mister Buttoo – *khattam-shud*,’ and the entire audience joined in. (*Haroun* 206)

The audience identifies with the characters of the story and recognizes in Mr. Buttoo the same leadership style that has oppressed the Chupwalas in Kahani. In the end, Rashid’s story encourages the people in the Valley of K to confront Mr. Buttoo. Finally, the citizens of the valley are “free to choose leaders they actually liked” (*Haroun* 207). Rashid’s role as a political conciliator is replicated in this episode and emphasizes the liberating aspect of stories. Storytelling *per se* is not able to promote changes in the world, but it can encourage the audience to do so.

According to Rushdie, “[t]his is the beauty of the wonder tale and its descendant, fiction: that one can simultaneously know that the story is a work of imagination, which is to say *untrue*, and believe it to contain profound truth. The boundary between the magical and the real, at such moments, ceases to exist” (“Wonder”). Fiction helps us understand the world around us by “enriching and intensifying our experience of the real” (Rushdie, “Wonder”). It gives us the opportunity to see life from another person’s perspective, in another place or in another historical period.

When Rashid and his son return to their city, it is no longer a sad place, thanks to the Walrus and the people at P2C2E House<sup>19</sup> who granted Haroun a wish: “I come from a sad city, a city so sad that it has forgotten its name. I want you to provide a happy ending, not just for my adventure, but for the whole sad city as well” (*Haroun* 202). The best part for Haroun is to encounter his mother Soraya, who has left Mr. Sengupta and returned home. The rain of artificial happy endings makes the city remember its name: Kahani, which means ‘story.’ Interestingly, Kahani is also the name of the moon from where Haroun and Rashid have just returned, which makes the city the double of the moon. The moment of remembering is crucial for the city because names mark the beginning of one’s existence, and they are crucial to the formation of one’s identity. Mainly due to the target public of the novel, the process of regaining the identity of the city is extremely simple. This process is far more complicated in *Midnight’s Children*, as it is shown in the subsequent chapter.

Haroun’s hometown and the moon are metaphors of how fiction and reality may overlap each other in literary works. According to Wolfgang Iser, fiction and reality are not direct opposites; therefore, the reader should not analyze a text by opposing these two terms. For Iser, “fiction is a means of telling something about reality” (“The Repertoire” 53). As an alternative to this binary opposition, Iser proposes a triad of the real, the fictive, and the imaginary. According to Iser, when reality is referred to in the text, it becomes part of the fictionalizing act, producing the imaginary, which is a combination of the real and the fictive. Reality enters the text through a selection of historical, social, cultural, and literary sources, which transit between the fictional and the real without attaching to any of them (“Fictionalizing” 1). As Iser advances, when the fictionalizing act oversteps the boundary of the real, “it provides the imaginary with the determinacy that it would not otherwise possess.

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<sup>19</sup> Process too Complicated to Explain. The P2C2E House is responsible for the technology that allows Kahani to be invisible to the people on Earth. They also control all the subscriptions to the Ocean of the Streams of Story.

In so doing, it enables the imaginary to take on an essential quality of the real, for determinacy is a minimal definition of reality” (“Fictionalizing” 3). The product of this indeterminacy is the imaginary, a fluid element that enables a movement beyond the existing world while it conceives new ones.

According to Iser, any literary text is composed of three fictionalizing acts: selection, combination, and self-disclosure. Selection consists of the relation of the text to other social and literary texts previous to the text itself (“Fictionalizing” 4). Its main objective is to decompose and transgress those systems. Combination comprises of the components within the texts, such as the characters, the setting, the plot, word combinations, and the creation of new words (“Fictionalizing” 7). Self-disclosure, or the “as-if” construction, allows the creation of new worlds that cannot be conceived only at the linguistic level or in the reality exterior to the text. This third act also calls attention to the fictionalization of the text and invites readers to suspend their disbeliefs and to experience the text *as if* it were real (“Fictionalizing” 15-16). The three fictionalizing acts build a path away from the real world into the imaginary one, constantly crossing the boundaries between them.

In the novel, the first crossing of this boundary happens when Haroun and Rashid travel from their world to the moon Kahani, which represents the real and the fictive, respectively. The second instance occurs when the P2C2E House pours “happy endings mixed up with the rain” into Haroun’s hometown (*Haroun* 208), which is an example of the fantastical world affecting the real world. By producing an artificial rain of happy endings, the fictional Kahani interferes in the lives of people in Haroun’s real world. Both examples point at the potentiality of the imaginary to combine the fantastical features of stories with the so-called reality. By exposing the permeability of the limits of fiction and reality, the novel subverts the definitions of those terms and shows that there is no conclusive distinction between them.

According to William Deresiewicz, the dynamics between imagination and reality is Rushdie's main theme. He affirms that most of the elements that seem "magic" in Rushdie's novels are the result of the artistic craft: "Magic in Rushdie often approaches a kind of lucid dreaming, where the boundary between imagination and reality is breached and desire is given direct power in the world." In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Rashid's stories affect his listeners' life as much as the storyteller influences the outcome of the political conflict in the magical world of Kahani.

*Haroun and the Sea of Stories* constantly challenges the oversimplification of binary oppositions. The barrier that separates speech and silence, good and evil, light and darkness, blurs toward the end of the story. Khatam-Shud, for instance, who stands out for his villainy, uses anti-stories to damage the Stream. The Cultmaster explains to Haroun that "*for every story there is an anti-story . . . every story – and so every Stream of Story – has a shadow-self*" (*Haroun* 160). In other words, for each story in the Stream there is a specific anti-story to cancel it. This metaphor illustrates the complex relation between stories in literature, the press, and other media, for each one of them can portray a different version of the same story.

Although, in the novel, anti-stories are used for destruction, they share an essential characteristic with counter-stories, for both offer direct responses to other stories. For every story, there should be other versions to confront the ideas presented by the previous narrative. Counter-stories, therefore, defy stereotypical assumptions perpetrated by dominant narratives, propose an alternative view of out-groups, and promote dialogue and interaction. As Rushdie once said in an interview to *Harvard Business Review*, people should "use literature to understand parts of the world which otherwise are obscure to them, although those parts of the world crop up in the news all the time" (Rushdie, "Salman Rushdie"). When people read literary works produced by foreign authors, they broaden their vision about other countries.

When a person reads Rushdie's novels, for instance, s/he gets acquainted with the ordinary life of the Indian people. The reader can, then, establish a connection to the people represented in the stories by recognizing the similarities, instead of concentrating on the differences that segregate them. In racial discrimination, for example, when one concentrates on the skin color, one loses the opportunity to know a person who may share the same nationality, tastes, language, religion, and so on. When one insists on the differences, one may disregard our common humanity. In the novel, the land of Kahani is polarized because Guppees and Chupwalas can only see each other as opposites. After meeting both parties, Haroun is able to know the beauties and the flaws of each people, which allows him to form an unbiased opinion about them and, eventually, to become the mediator between Chupwalas and Guppees.

Although *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is usually read as an allegory of the battle between speech and censorship, the novel also presents a complex allegory of the postcolonial relation between the colony and the Empire.<sup>20</sup> The characters who represent both sides cannot be classified into a simple binary opposition. As this chapter has shown, the characterization of Guppees and Chupwalas overcomes the limits of the good-and-evil opposition. Moreover, through stories like *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, readers may revive their memories of a time when it was easier to believe in imaginary characters and in fantastical lands where the problems of the world could be solved with potions of happy endings. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is a remarkable introduction to the Indian world. It entertains children and adults and gives both the opportunity to ponder on the advantages of living in a world where differences are accepted and celebrated. Finally, the novel shows how

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<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, Khattam-Shud's attempt to destroy the Stream of Stories is an example of censorship. He also threatens to stitch Princess Batcheat's lips. Another example is the Mr. Buttoo, who prohibits Rashid from telling sad stories. On the other hand, Guppees and Rashid stand for free speech.

stories can bring self-awareness to an entire community and how they can transform people's views of themselves and others.



### 3. Saleem Sinai, the Mirror of the Nation in *Midnight's Children*

Published in 1981, *Midnight's Children* is Rushdie's second novel and his first best-seller. It has become a symbol of Rushdie's style, a novel brimming with history, a magical-realist tone, real-life characters, and a range of intertextual references. Saleem Sinai, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, is born at midnight on August 15, 1947, India's Independence Day. Differently from Rashid Khalifa in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Saleem is not a professional storyteller. However, Saleem assumes a similar role when he decides to put his life's journey into paper. Through his narrative, Saleem revisits his past and makes sense of his position in the world. His writing also helps him preserve his memories, gives him a sense of closure, and exposes his parental hope towards his son, Aadam Sinai. Thus, the present chapter discusses Saleem's relation with Indian history, analyzes his narrative in relation to storytelling, and shows how *Midnight's Children*, as a counter-story to colonialism, has contributed to the postcolonial agenda.

Saleem's narrative starts in 1915 when Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, a recently graduated doctor, is called to examine Naseem Ghani. His visits to her house repeat constantly until the day Aadam proposes. The couple gets married and has five children. One of their daughters, Mumtaz Aziz becomes Amina Sinai after she marries her second husband, Ahmed Sinai. They have two children, Saleem and Jamila (or the Brass Monkey, as she is usually called before she becomes a famous singer). Although they raise Saleem as their son, they learn that the boy is not their biological child. Mary Pereira, one of the midwives at the hospital, changes Amina's baby for the baby of a poor couple. Saleem becomes the son of Ahmed and Amina Sinai, whereas their biological son, Shiva, becomes the son of Wee Willie Winkie and Vanita, who dies right after giving birth. Saleem grows up as an average child until he becomes nine and discovers his midnight gift: he can read other people's thoughts

and exchange messages with the other midnight's children. Each of them has a particular gift: the closer to midnight they are born, the greater their talent is.

The first period of post-colonial independence was a challenge for Indian writers, mainly for those who wrote in English: the theme, the characters, the degree of realism and imagination, and the political position were some of the problems Indian English writers had to deal with (Rege 153). *Midnight's Children* brought a literary solution for those issues because it was politically engaged with pro-independence movements and filled with literary creativity (Rege 153). As Josna Rege concludes, *Midnight's Children* was a landmark for Indian English literature because “[i]t enabled [Indian English writers] to tell their personal stories in their own voices as national epics” (171). As counter-narratives to the discourse of Empire, Indian English works provide an anti-colonial response to European narratives about India and, concurrently, propose forms of (re-)constructing national identities.

Although the characters of the novel are correlatives to the nation, “a mirror reflecting the culture at large” (Mossman 69), there is a place where the individual can be authentic (Mossman 74). Mark Mossman observes, “[W]hat Rushdie is writing here is not some sort of national allegory about India alone, but a story about individual meaning, about the eccentric creation of meaning, and the particular creation of truth” (75). Indeed, Saleem's autobiography provides an alternative to the colonial mainstream narrative about India and a first-person account of his private life. The errors, confessions, and personal comments presented by Saleem emphasize his individuality and calls attention to the fact that it is his version of the events.

According to Himanshu Parmar, *Midnight's Children* opposes to the logical world of the colonizers and their view of India as this exotic land of *One Thousand and One Nights* (439). Although the novel does not completely deny Western views towards that country, it presents a modified representation of India. The use of Indian English also sets a difference

between Indian works and the works of the Empire (Parmar 430). As Parmar highlights, independence has allowed the colonies to portray themselves, which changes the way they are represented (425).

Barbara Schröttner remarks that the main themes of *Midnight's Children* are identity and historical memory (293). She argues that postcolonial narratives enable Indians to reconnect to their past and reconstruct their identity by considering both their pre-colonial state and the marks left by colonialism. For Schröttner, postcolonial works have become a tool to defy the colonizer's narrative and, eventually, secure the colony's self-representation (285). Similarly, Josna Rege affirms that the novel proposes "a reconfiguration of the relationship between the Self and the Nation" (146). Rege affirms that an individual's story affects the nation as much as the latter molds the former, for one's personal memory is always related to history. In *Midnight's Children*, this division between nation and individual is reconciled through Saleem Sinai (Rege 157). Even though he is connected to his nation by birth, he claims his independence when he decides to be the narrator of his own story.

In the same manner, Mayra Olalquiaga puts forward that the process of developing a national identity is always influenced by colonization even when "this identity is affirmed in opposition to European domination" (Olalquiaga 28). For Olalquiaga, *Midnight's Children* revises the concept of nation-ness and challenges generalizing definitions of the nation (37). Saleem becomes a symbol of India because he is a product of the encounters of Hindu, Muslim, and British cultures. His biological mother is Hindu, his biological father is British, and he is raised by a Muslim family. The negotiation of his heterogeneous heritage mirrors India and its on-going process of defining national identities that would comprehend all its national subjects.

For Patrick Hogan, the synthetization of a nation into one single definition is an authoritarian act that would be as oppressive as colonization (512). Hogan divides the

elements that compose one's identity into two groups: categorial and practical identities. A person's categorial identity is composed of external factors that are attributed to her/him. Some examples are gender, ethnicity, religion, social class, and political affiliations. In contrast, a person's practical identity is defined by his/her living experience, expectations, and goals (Hogan 518). It is more related to how and where a person lives than to which groups he/she belongs to.

Hogan claims that categorial identities should not be used as the only criteria to define a national identity (Hogan 517). This definition should also consider practical identities that tend to promote local interactions. Hence, both categorial and practical identities need to be taken into consideration when one proposes inclusive definitions of national identities. To exemplify those types of identities, Hogan mentions the characters Shiva and Saleem.<sup>21</sup> The first stands as the representative of oppression, whereas the second stands for supposed democracy and an all-embracing definition of India. Shiva seeks power and hegemony, while Saleem wants to congregate and to hear all midnight's children. Towards the end of the novel, Shiva becomes the enemy of all midnight's children when he aids the government to capture all of them.

In the novel, Gandhi's nationalist ideas remain in the domestic sphere (Weickgenannt 69). Conflicts and disagreements in the Aziz household, and later on in the Sinai family, "can be read as an affirmation of [the] elevation of the inner, feminine sphere of the home as the place where Indian nationalism creatively imagined the parameters of the community of the nation" (Weickgenannt 69). The domestic sphere is matriarchal and women are the keepers of Indian traditions, whereas the husbands, Aadam Aziz and Ahmed Sinai, unsuccessfully struggle in the outside world. For Nicole Weickgenannt, the war of starvation and the period

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<sup>21</sup> Shiva is named after a Hindu god known for his fertility. Even though Shiva is the midnight's child who has the most children, he does not actually assume the role of a father. Saleem, whose name means "peaceful," becomes the father of one of Shiva's children.

of silence used by Reverend Mother to protest against her husband's ruling are echoes of Gandhian strategies applied in nationalist movements (69). This is one example of how women embody the core of Indian culture. Weickgenannt also states that the inner (spiritual) domain of the Indian household reinforces the idea of Mother India. In contrast, the outer (material) world is dominated by men, who represent the Western patriarchal society (66).

According to Tim Parnell, the abundance of postcolonial references shows that ex-colonies, such as India and Pakistan, cannot dismiss the colonial period (237). Moreover, anti-colonial works provide "an alternative discourse which does not merely replicate the dogmatic discourses of cultural nationalism" (247). Postcolonial novels revisit the colonial period in order to deal with the problems left by it. They also seek to overcome the discourse of Empire through the use of satire (245). In *Midnight's Children*, for instance, Saleem notices that women feel attracted to the British Methwold because of his hair, which the British man reveals to be a wig before departing back to his county. In the end, the object of attraction is, in fact, a source of embarrassment.

By looking inward to the richness of the Indian cultural and historical heritage, Rushdie's novels subvert the representation of India as the other of the Empire and provide multiple configurations of Indian national identities based on the diversity of its people. In order to better understand the relation between Saleem and India, it is necessary to develop the concept of nation further. Thus, the following section presents some definitions of the term and a brief discussion on the construction of national identities before turning to the reading of the novel per se.

#### National Identities in Saleem's Counter-Narrative

According to Benedict Anderson, the rise of the nation is a consequence of the decline of religious communities and dynasty realms. As he explains, several classical societies were

primarily united by religion. They shared a sacred text and language and saw themselves as the center of the world (B. Anderson, "Cultural Roots" 13). The outsiders were accepted into the community if they converted to the religion and learnt the sacred language. The other kind of classical society was based on dynasties, the great monarchies that ruled Western Europe until the seventeenth century. Those communities started to experience a decline when the exploration of the world increased and Latin, the sacred language of Christianity and the predominant language in education, was gradually being substituted for vernacular languages (B. Anderson, "Cultural Roots" 18-19). Furthermore, the rise of the nation in the eighteenth century was possible because the newspaper and the novel "provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation" (B. Anderson, "Cultural Roots" 25). As both genres based their content on the lives of ordinary people, their audience were inclined to see the nation as a group of anonymous people, instead of prophets and kings.

For Ernest Renan, what defines a nation is a social agreement rather than other factors, such as race, language, religion or geography (20). The definition of the nation cannot be solely based on those categories because race is an arbitrary criterion, languages can be learnt, religion is a personal choice, and geography is a political issue (14-18). For Renan, sharing "a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion" unifies the nation more effectively than any geographical delimitation (19). Alternatively, he proposes to see the nation as a group of people united by the memory of a common past and the present agreement to live together (19).

Renan's proposal is later echoed in Benedict Anderson's theory of *imagined community*, which defines nations as groups of people who do not know all the other members inside their community, but, even so, deliberately share a sense of belonging together (B. Anderson, Introduction 6). This community is *limited* by geographical

boundaries or national territories. It is *sovereign* because, when it becomes independent, the Western notion of state grants the nation political power (B. Anderson, Introduction 7).

Lastly, this community is *social*, since “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (B. Anderson, “Cultural Roots” 9).

Definitions of the nation grounded on historical background may ignore the modern arrangements generated by immigration, diaspora, and other cultural encounters. An alternative for that interpretation is given by Florian Coulmas, who reads Benedict Anderson’s idea of *imagined communities* as being “created and fluid” rather than static (67). However, Coulmas points out that the decision “to live together and shape [the] future” is far more important than the memory of common past (68). For Coulmas, people who share “culture, custom, and above all language” also constitute a nation (68). He advances, “Boundaries between ethnicities, races, nationalities, faiths, and languages are increasingly seen to be constructed and therefore fluid and moveable” (69). The exchanges among countries have not decreased after the end of colonialism. On the contrary, globalization has promoted numerous transfers of cultural products, business, and workforce. Besides, many people have deliberately decided to move to other countries. In spite of the reasons for those inter-nation movements, globalization has created hybrid subjects inside and outside their homelands who are constantly negotiating their identities in relation to their nations and to the other members of their communities.

Since the population is not homogeneous, it is unlikely to summarize national identities in one single statement that could comprehend the variety of individuals found within the nation. As Bhabha points out,

We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population. The barred Nation It/Self, alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal signifying space that is internally marked by the discourses of

minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference. (*The Location* 212)

One fixed definition of a national identity may reinforce stereotypes and give the wrong impression that people share the same characteristics just because they were born in, or descend from, the same country. Thus, national identity has to consider all the subjects within a given society and their distinct gender, social status, language, and political affiliations (Bhabha, "Introduction" 2). The concept of national identity should allow cultural differences to coexist and avoid essentialist political ideologies or social hierarchy. In addition, it should be constantly reevaluated so that new individuals are accepted as part of its imagined community. Bhabha's use of the word *DissemiNation* highlights the idea that the national identity is fragmented, and it should not be condensed in totalizations. As Bhabha puts forward, "The people will no longer be contained in that national discourse of the teleology of progress; the anonymity of individuals; the spatial horizontality of community; the homogeneous time of social narratives; the historicist visibility of modernity" (*The Location* 216). Individuality needs to be evident in order to highlight the heterogeneity of a nation and the multiple stories that constitute the narrative of a country.

The production of alternative narratives decreases the tendency to consider only the official history as a unified narrative of a country. Bhabha explains, "In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation*" (Bhabha, *The Location* 209). The ambivalent aspects of this process lie on the division between past and present narratives that represent, respectively, the colonizer's pedagogical texts, used to instruct Europe on the Third World, and the postcolonial literature that writes over, in a palimpsestic manner, essentialist concepts and stereotypical definitions.



Pedagogical narratives refer to “self-sameness of community” (Huddart, “The Nation” 72) and how the population is classified into static definitions, while performativity hints at a constant transformation (Huddart, “The Nation” 73).

Generally speaking, European works about the colonials did not reflect the plurality of the identities found in the colonies. As postcolonial identities contain a variety of social positions, political affiliations, and economic practices, they are fragmented and multiple (S. Hall, “Introduction” 4). In a constant movement towards transformation, postcolonial subjects use “the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation” (S. Hall, “Introduction” 4). Because identities are constructed within the boundaries of discourse, the location and the historical time of the narrative are crucial elements of this equation (S. Hall, “Introduction” 4). By showing representations of the nation within the limits of time and place, postcolonial novels, such as *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, bring forward the effects of history in the construction of national identities. In those novels, the characters are constantly affected by the political events and social movements that belong to a particular moment in the history of India.

The reconstruction of cultural discourse requires a shift in the content and a revision of pedagogical texts that bring forward the classical binary opposition between the First and the Third World (Bhabha, *The Location* 276-78). The concepts of ambivalence, hybridity, and in-betweenness reveal the complexity of postcolonial discourse (Bhabha, *The Location* 278). From this perspective, it is possible to understand the crossover between postcolonial

content and postmodernist style that grounds *Midnight's Children*.<sup>22</sup> To be more specific, Rushdie presents both the traditional relation between the Empire and the colony, mainly in the chapter "Methwold," and an extrapolation of national identities through the variety of characters that compose the novel.

In the first paragraph of his autobiography, Saleem informs the readers that he is "handcuffed to history, [his] destinies indissolubly chained to those of [his] country" (*Midnight* 3). Saleem has inherited that connection from his grandfather Aziz, who is also vulnerable to history and women. Both Aziz and Saleem's vulnerabilities relate to a passive attitude towards what happens to them. Whereas Aziz assumes a passive position in relation to his wife, Reverend Mother, Saleem sees himself as a victim of women's will. Mary Pereira, who exchanges the babies, and the character of Indira Gandhi, who orders the sterilization of all midnight's children, are just some examples of how Saleem's life is repeatedly subjected to women's actions.

Furthermore, the words "handcuffed" and "chained" point at Saleem's lack of agency or free will in relation to the story of his country and to his own personal story. Saleem's vulnerability to history transforms him into a passive character. Saleem's passivity may also be a remnant of his ancestors' lack of resistance during the colonial period. As Edward Said explains, there was "little domestic resistance" to imperialist settlement on the part of the natives ("Overlapping" 43). Likewise, Saleem remains in a passive position.<sup>23</sup> For a long time in his life, Saleem has been the object of other people's secrets, prophecies, letters, and news articles. When he tries to interfere, he usually has terrible results. Saleem's attachment to his

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<sup>22</sup> The term postmodernism refers to a philosophical, artistic, and highly heterogeneous movement that took place after World War II. Its main goals were the valorization of popular media, the dismantling of dominant narratives, and the subversion of the conventional forms of art. Some postmodern theorists include Linda Hutcheon, David Lodge, Jean- François Lyotard, and Fredric Jameson.

<sup>23</sup> In "Autobiography," Rushdie tells us that he tried to portray Saleem as a more active character, but the result was not satisfactory. From that experience, Rushdie learned that "[t]he author can create character, but once the character has been created, the author is no longer free. He must operate within the limits of the human being he has invented."

country is prophesized by the seer Ramram Seth long before his birth. In fact, the prophecy refers to both Saleem and Shiva. Even though Saleem is not the baby in Amina's womb, the prophesy summarizes his life-story:

A son, Sahiba, who will *never be older than his motherland – neither older nor younger . . .* There will be two heads – but you shall see only one – there will be knees and a nose, a nose and knees . . . Newspaper praises him, two mothers raise him! Bicyclists love him – but, crowds will shove him! Sisters will weep; cobra will creep . . . Washing will hide him – voices will guide him! Friends mutilate him – blood will betray him! . . . Spittoons will brain him – doctors will drain him – jungle will claim him – wizards reclaim him! Soldiers will try him – tyrants will fry him . . . He will have sons without having sons! He will be old before he is old! And he will die . . . before he is dead. (*Midnight* 114-15)

This passage demonstrates the passive role Saleem plays in his own life, for he is the object, not the subject, of most of the actions described in the prophesy. The revelation does not list Saleem's deeds, but things that happen to him, events that he cannot control or avoid. Inside the realm of the novel, Saleem's autobiography is a counter-narrative to that prophecy and the stories told about him. When Saleem becomes the author of his own narrative, he finally leaves this passive position. As Rege puts it, Saleem transits from victim "into Protagonist, simply through the telling of his own story" (170). In the same manner, *Midnight's Children* stands as a counter-narrative to orientalist views about India.

Right after his birth, Saleem becomes famous for being the first child born on Independence Day. His birthday is celebrated by newspapers and even the prime minister congratulates him: "Newspaper celebrated me; politicians ratified my position. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote: 'Dear Baby Saleem, My belated congratulations on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also

eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own” (*Midnight* 167). Saleem’s birth is a symbol of a new phase in India, which is reborn from the ashes of colonization. Nehru’s letter establishes a clear connection between India and Saleem, a relationship that remains up to the end of Saleem’s narrative.

Because of that, Saleem has always felt obliged to be the pride of the family, as he reveals in another moment of the narrative: “I was, at that time, a dutiful child. I longed to give them what they wanted, what soothsayers and framed letters had promised them; I simply did not know how. Where did greatness come from? How did you get some?” (*Midnight* 215). This uncertainty causes some discomfort and affects the process of his self-knowledge and the construction of his identity. Overwhelmed by too many expectations toward him, Saleem faces some difficulties finding his purpose in the world. As he confesses, “[M]y early popularity had its problematic aspects, because I was bombarded with a confusing multiplicity of views on the subject, being a Blessed One to a guru under a tap, a voyeur to Lila Sabarmati; in the eyes of Nussie-the-duck I was a rival, and a more successful rival, to her own Sonny . . . to my two-headed mother I was all kinds of babyish things” (*Midnight* 178). In his desire to demonstrate his value, Saleem becomes obsessed with his call for greatness, which seems a goal imposed by Saleem on himself rather than by his parents. His urge to serve his country increases a great deal when he discovers his magical power.

Every child born in the first hour on Independence Day has received a special gift, the closest to midnight the greatest the gift is: “all over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents – the children of midnight were also the children *of the time*: fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen. Especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream” (*Midnight* 159). Saleem’s ability is an advanced type of telepathy: he can hear people’s thoughts, receive, and transmit

messages. Eventually, his mind becomes the conference room of the midnight's children: "they were there in my head, in the front now, no longer a muffled background noise I'd never noticed, all of them, sending their here-I-am signals, from north south east west . . . the other children born during that midnight hour, calling 'I,' 'I,' 'I,' and 'I'" (*Midnight* 259). Saleem's goal to help his country gets more prominent when he meets all those children before his tenth birthday. In Saleem's thoughts, the midnight's children would become "a third principle . . . the force which drives between the horns of dilemma; for only by being other, by being new, can [they] fulfil the promise of [their] birth!" (*Midnight* 354). Their main objective would be solving the problems of their country, such as social, gender, and economic injustices. Filled with good intentions, Saleem founds the Midnight's Children Conference, a group composed of five hundred eight-one midnight's children who have survived up to their tenth birthday.

Echoing Saleem and India's connection, the Midnight's Children Conference mirrors India society and it inevitably repeats the failure of the government to promote significant changes. As Jean Kane advances, the Midnight's Children's Conference represents in a microcosmic scale the frustrated attempts to unify India's government, culture, and people (100). In the following passage, Saleem describes how the midnight children have become the embodiment of Indian social problems:

Children, however magical, are not immune to their parents; and as the prejudices and world-views of adults began to take over their minds, I found children from Maharashtra loathing Gujaratis, and fair-skinned northerners reviling Dravidian 'blackies'; there were religious rivalries; and class entered our councils. The rich children turned up their noses at being in such lowly company; Brahmins began to feel uneasy at permitting even their thoughts to touch the thoughts of untouchables; while, among the low-born, the pressures of poverty and Communism were becoming

evident . . . and, on top of all this, there were clashes of personality, and the hundred squalling rows which are unavoidable in a parliament composed entirely of half-grown brats. (*Midnight* 353-54)

The Midnight's Children Conference never fulfills Saleem's dream and, eventually, those children descend from the status of hero-like entities to victims of their country. During the Emergency, the Widow forces the remaining midnight's children to being sterilized. The process deprives them of procreation and their magical gifts. It also dismantles Saleem's dream of social integration and national improvements.

Another important community in Saleem's life is the people chosen by the departing English man, William Methwold, to inhabit his condominium. Initially a piece of Europe in Bombay, the Methwold's Estate becomes a metonym of Indian society and reveals the tension between colonizers and colonials. In his last colonial whim, Methwold agrees to sell his property only to those who accept living in the houses without changing them until Independence Day: "Selected by William Methwold, these people who would form the centre of [Saleem's] world moved into the Estate and tolerated the curious whims of the Englishman – because the price, after all, was right" (*Midnight* 130). Methwold believes that Indians are ungrateful because they do not recognize the benefits of the British presence in their country. He claims that England has modernized India, "built your roads, schools, railway trains, parliamentary system, all worthwhile things. Taj Mahal was falling down until an Englishman bothered to see to it. And now, suddenly, independence. Seventy days to get out. I'm dead against it myself, but what's to be done?" (*Midnight* 126-27). Methwold is unable to see that, despite the structural improvements, the British dominance over India was not legitimate.

Methwold's strategy eventually changes the lives of the new owners by making them assimilate English habits, such as gathering for tea in the afternoon and listening to Winkie's

presentations. Some objects are also kept after independence: the fisherman painting in Saleem's nursery, Ahmed's whisky cabinet, Ibrahim's ceiling fans, and Lila Sabarmati's pianola. Saleem notices, "[S]inger and fisherman became institutions of our lives, like the cocktail hour, which was already a habit too powerful to be broken" (*Midnight* 175). This episode also brings forward an example of colonial mimicry when it shows how Ahmed is more willing to accept Methwold's demands than Amina is. Indeed, Ahmed's desire for the status, the power, and the respect associated with the English is pronounced when he, "apeing Oxford drawl, anxious to impress the departing Englishman – responded with, 'Actually, old chap, ours is a pretty distinguished family, too'" (*Midnight* 147). Ahmed even creates a fictional heritage in order to feel as important as Methwold. All those examples illustrate the English influence over India even after its independence. After all, almost nine decades of colonial dominance would not efface overnight.

Apart from his property, Methwold also leaves a son behind: Saleem, the product of the Englishman's affair with Vanita. The child of a Hindu mother and a Christian father, but raised by Muslim parents, Saleem is located in-between those religions. Even before he is aware of his heritage, Saleem has always dreamt of a united nation where every culture is esteemed. As the encounter between those nations was not only political and economic, but also grounded on interpersonal relationships, the miscegenation of the Indian people was a consequence of the colonial period.

Saleem's biological origin is only revealed after the boy loses his finger and has to be taken to a hospital. Saleem, then, moves to his uncle's house, without knowing why his father cannot stand him anymore. The boy is confused because he does not know why he is there or when he is going back home. He also feels guilty about causing so much trouble to his parents. The period away from home marks the beginning of Saleem's transition from childhood into maturity. As Saleem ponders, "[A] human being, inside himself, is anything

but a whole, anything but homogeneous; all kinds of everywhichthing are jumped up inside him, and he is one person one minute and another the next” (*Midnight* 328). Without knowing the motive of his exile, Saleem decides to adapt to the new situation and be the best child his uncle Hanif and his wife Pia have ever seen.

Saleem’s life milestones mirror national events and, in several moments, his personal story intersects Indian history. As Saleem’s gift allows him to know other people’s secrets and thoughts, he starts to use those insights for his own benefits. Amina’s affair, for instance, is never discovered by her family, except for Saleem, who, unable to confront his mother, redirects his rage to Lila Sabarmati. During his stay in his uncle’s house, Saleem finds out that his aunt Pia has had an affair with Homi Catrack, who breaks up with her because of his other mistress, Lila Sabarmati. Then, Saleem writes a letter warning Commander Sabarmati of Lila’s infidelity. The Commander kills Homi Catrack and injures his wife. His crime reaches national proportions, for even the president is contacted in an attempt to guarantee the Commander’s promotion in the Army.

The Sabarmati affair becomes the most popular murder case in the history of India, as the newspaper broadcasts: ““It is a theatre in which India will discover who she was, what she is, and what she might become”” (*Midnight* 363). Saleem confesses: “Commander Sabarmati was only a puppet; I was the puppet-master, and the nation performed my play – only I hadn’t meant it! I didn’t think he’d . . . I only wanted to . . . a scandal, yes, a scare, a lesson to all unfaithful wives and mothers, but not that, never, no” (*Midnight* 363-64). The Sabarmati affair makes Amina stop seeing her ex-husband Nadir Khan. It also leads Hanif to commit suicide after he stops receiving the sponsorship from Homi Catrack. This episode shows how Saleem’s actions affect other people’s lives and how he interferes in Indian politics and society. Moreover, it demonstrates Saleem’s uncertainties about his role in his social circle



and in the national sphere. Despite his disposition to help his country, Saleem ends up meddling with the private and the public orders.

Saleem is not the only midnight's child that has interfered in the history of his country. Saleem's alter-ego, Shiva, who is the biological son of Amina and Ahmed Sinai and, therefore, the oldest midnight's child, has played a significant role throughout the narrative. By reason of Mary Pereira's crime, Shiva is deprived of a middle-class life, a loving family, and all the fame that follows the very midnight's child. Being Saleem's antagonist, Shiva stands for a totalitarian government style and for extremist nationalism. In the conference, Shiva tries to impose the same authoritarian leadership he exercises on his street gang: "my father said I got born at exactly midnight also – so don't you see, that makes us joint bosses of this gang of yours! Midnight is best, agreed? So – those other kids gotta do like we tell them" (*Midnight* 305). Saleem has never liked Shiva because of the latter's totalitarian opinions and his insistent refusal to open his mind to the other midnight's children. After Saleem is aware of the baby exchange, he starts to consider Shiva a threat and avoids any contact with his rival.

Saleem and Shiva are opposite and complementary parts of the same self. They symbolize the fears and anxieties of the Indian nation in the post-independence period. Named after the god of procreation and destruction, Shiva represents the extremist wing of nationalist movements, whereas Saleem assumes a more democratic agenda. The first wants to defend the nation via authority and force, the second via speech. Their characterizations abide by Sigmund Freud's definition of the uncanny, which appears in literature as the double scheme.<sup>24</sup> In novels, double characters usually have similar appearance, share the same knowledge and thoughts, and are unsure of the limits of their personalities (Freud 522). Some

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<sup>24</sup> Freud defines the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (515).

of these features are noticeable in Shiva and Saleem's characterizations. For example, their midnight talents, which are connected to a part of their bodies, determine their personality and goals. Whereas Shiva and "his surliness, his unstarched shorts, his knobbly knees" (*Midnight* 176) represent physical strength and virility, Saleem and his "cucumber-nose and bandy legs" (*Midnight* 234) represent intelligence and tolerance. Shiva uses his strength to subjugate others, whereas Saleem uses words to solve his problems. This difference is also noticeable in their speeches. As Saleem has had access to education, his sentences are grammatically correct, whereas Shiva, who has grown up in the streets, uses a lot of slangs, swear words, and abbreviations. Moreover, as most of their interaction occurs telepathically, Shiva initially has free access to Saleem's memories and thoughts, which compromises Saleem's privacy. Finally, Shiva becomes the progenitor of numerous children, whereas Saleem becomes the adoptive father of one of Shiva's biological sons. The limits between their thoughts, their family connections, and their roles in their country are constantly changing throughout their lifespan.

When Saleem is questioned about his identity, he is certain that knowing about his biological parents has not changed the past. Mary Pereira's revelation has not nullified his connection to Amina and Ahmed Sinai. He is still "Saleem Sinai . . . Snotnose, Stainface, Sniffer, Baldy, Piece-of-the-Moon" (*Midnight* 158). If we consider Saleem's origins as a metaphor for colonialism, it is possible to affirm that the substitution of Saleem for Shiva represents the replacement of purity for hybridity. In terms of culture, politics, language, and social arrangements, the new independent India is not able to deny the colonial period and to return to a previous status. The miscegenation of Indian people, the customs left by the colonizers, the economic exchanges, and the English language are results of colonialism that cannot be erased.

Saleem becomes a representative of the Indian population because his hybridity mirrors the multiplicity of identities found in his country. In the same manner, his narrative reflects the multitude of stories of the Indian people, who Saleem identifies as constituents of his self:

I no longer want to be anything except what who I am. Who am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come. Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter; each 'I', every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude. I repeat for the last time: to understand me, you'll have to swallow a world.

*(Midnight 535)*

Saleem eventually understands that one single person cannot bear the burden of representing the whole nation. The stories of Saleem's family from his grandfather's day until 1978 and the stories of the minor characters show that every single person carries within him/her a portion of the nation. Together with the historical moments, those individual narratives represent in a small scale the numerous connections present in the world (Clingman 103). As Stephen Clingman puts it, nations and individuals are plural. The construction of a nation's and an individual's identities is subject to "principles of division, doubling, mirroring, reversal, overflow – both the less and more, both the cracks and the crowd, both the lack and – always – the excess" (123). A person's identity is shaped by his/her family, background, economic and social statuses. Likewise, a nation is composed of the abundance of its people, religions, traditions, and languages. When these elements are put together, they form the whole that constitutes personal and national identities.

### Narrating the Self: Personal Identity in Saleem's Autobiography

In his narrative, Saleem's fragmented self is visible through the use of different pronouns and names. The use of first or third persons sets a distance between Saleem's past self and his present one, and highlights the changes in his personality. The following passage illustrates how he plays with the pronouns: "He and I, I and he . . . I no longer have his gift; he never had mine. There are times when he seems a stranger, almost . . ." (*Midnight* 230). Young Saleem is able to read minds, but the present Saleem can no longer communicate through telepathy. Young Saleem believes he can change his country, whereas the old Saleem has given up the task. Past and present selves are, therefore, complementary and represent two different moments in Saleem's life: his youth and adulthood, naivety and maturity, respectively.

In between those phases, Saleem becomes Buddha, a version of his self that he does not recognize as being his own: "But I insist: not I. He. He, Buddha. Who, until the snake, would remain not-Saleem; who, in spite of running-from, was still separated from his past; although he clutched, in his limpet fist, a certain silver spittoon" (*Midnight* 502-503). After the bomb attack that almost killed his entire family, Saleem loses his memory and temporarily becomes a soldier in the Pakistani Army, where his new gift, a developed olfactory skill, guarantees him a job as a dog-man. During this period in the army, he is no longer Saleem Sinai. Emptied of his personal story, Saleem becomes another person.

As Adriana Cavarero explains, when a person suffers from amnesia, she loses her identity because she cannot remember "the *text* of her identity" (36). Identities are, thus, composed of the stories about the self. Without those stories, a person becomes "a sort of empirical life without a story" (Cavarero 37). This explains why Saleem does not accept Buddha as himself but, even so, adds his time in the Pakistani Army to his tale. Saleem only remembers his identity when he is stung by a snake and his story flows out of his mouth like

a waterfall (*Midnight* 508). This is a crucial passage in the narrative for, as he remembers his true self, his story is exposed without censorship or embarrassment: “The child-soldiers listened, spellbound, to the stories issuing from his mouth, beginning with a birth at midnight, and continuing unstoppably, because he was reclaiming everything, all of it, all lost histories, all the myriad complex processes that go to make a man” (*Midnight* 509). His companions listen to the most truthful version of his story, a version without complex narrative devices or fictionalized passages. The recovery of his story sets him back to the course of his life, but he still does not remember his first name. He is only reminded of it by Parvati-the-witch, who recognizes him on the streets, and then the process of recovering his identity is complete.

As for the timeframe of the narrative, the story starts in 1915, with the encounter of his grandparents Naseem Ghani and Aadam Aziz in Kashmir. Then, it moves to 1942 to tell the story of his parents Amina and Ahmed Sinai. After Saleem’s birth, the story progresses until 1978, the year Saleem writes his memoir. Saleem skips some years in this timeline because he organizes his narrative based on relevant events in his life. Although the main story follows a chronological order, the narrative is filled with degressions and foreshadowing. The rhythm of his narrative is influenced by those decisions. Sometimes he dedicates several pages to one single event, such as to the Indian Independence Day. Other times he just mentions what happens briefly and moves to another moment in his life, as he does when he informs the reader about Tai’s death. This variation mirrors the rhythm of oral storytelling, mainly when Saleem sets a quick pace. In the chapter “Tick, Tock,” Saleem starts a countdown that accelerates the tempo and creates a state of suspense. In that same chapter, Saleem provides a summary of the first eight chapters, which alters the flow of the narrative as well. This repetition is another characteristic of oral storytelling. Repetition is a recurrent practice in oral cultures because it helps the audience memorize the narrative (Ong 40). In oral performances, this technique helps the storyteller think about what comes next

without making pauses (Ong 40). In the novel, the summaries remind readers of the events that have brought Saleem to specific points in the story.

In order to reinforce the idea of verisimilitude given by historical time, Saleem describes in details the cities, the houses, the means of transportation, and the streets of the places his family has lived, such as Kashmir, Old Delhi, and Bombay. He also includes descriptions of the smell of those places and moments as if it were an indispensable characteristic. He can feel, for instance, “the odours of burgeoning romance and the sharp stink of [his] grandmother’s curiosity and strength” back to the days when his grandparents lived in Agra (*Midnight* 64). This passage exemplifies how Saleem uses his olfactory skills to endow his narrative with sensory stimulation. In addition, it helps readers experience Saleem’s gift more vividly.

Another relevant characteristic of his autobiography is the excessive number of stories. As Saleem puts it, “[T]here are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours” (Rushdie, *Midnight* 4). In “Imaginary Homelands,” Rushdie explains that this multiplicity of stories was intended to praise “the Indian talent for non-stop self-regeneration” and to highlight “the infinite possibilities of the country” (16). On this matter, Stephen Clingman affirms that “Saleem’s life is inseparable from all the lives that have produced him and to which he is attached” (102). To understand Saleem, the readers need to know his friends, family, and neighbors, because every single person who has crossed Saleem’s path has changed his life. Because of that, those minor stories are not perceived as *detours*, a narrative device that delays the end of the story and creates suspense (Cobley 12). As those minor stories flow naturally along the main plot, they provide moments of pleasure to the readers and offer some relief from the complexity of Saleem’s story. By converging into the main story-line, those stories endow Saleem’s autobiography with a sense of community and integration (Thiara, *Salman* 38).

Storytelling enters Saleem's life through his grandmother, Reverend Mother, who tells Saleem and his sister stories "about the boatman, and the Hummingbird, and the Rani of Cooch Naheen" (*Midnight* 381). Those episodes, which compose the first chapters of Saleem's autobiography, legitimize Saleem's place in the Aziz-Sinai household and strengthen his ties to his family. When Saleem writes his narrative, he chooses to trace his life back to Aadam Aziz, instead of linking it to his biological parents Willie and Vanita. Saleem reveals that

when we eventually discovered the crime of Mary Pereira, we all found that it *made no difference!* I was still their son: they remained my parents. In a kind of collective failure of imagination, we learned that we simply could not think our way out of our pasts . . . if you asked my father (even him, despite all that happened!) who his son was, nothing on earth would have induced him to point in the direction of the accordionist's knock-kneed, unwashed boy. Even though he would grow up, this Shiva, to be something of a hero. (*Midnight* 158)

Saleem has always had plenty of doubts about his identity, but his connection to the Aziz-Sinai clan is not one of them. To a certain extent, his sense of belonging is due to storytelling, inasmuch as he has appropriated the stories of the Aziz family as his own.

Furthermore, his decision to start his story with Aadam Aziz may be due to the fact that his grandfather is the first person in the family to accept principles of progress, modernity, and inclusion. His studies in Germany seem to affect the way he sees his religion and his nation. After his foreign experience, Aziz sees his homeland "through travelled eyes . . . he noticed the narrowness, the proximity of the horizon; and felt sad, to be at home and feel so utterly enclosed" (*Midnight* 7). His hybrid perspective enables him to see problems and limitations in his community. It also helps him see India as a space of coexistence,

instead of a polarized arena, an idea that Saleem has inherited from his grandfather through his mother.

Amina's attitude towards people from other cultures is shown at least three times in the novel. The first example happens when she saves the Hindu boy Lifafa Das in the Muslim neighborhood. The second situation occurs when she visits the seer in a poor neighborhood in Agra. For the first time in her life, Amina sees "the invisible people" and their precarious living conditions. When she loses her "city eyes" (*Midnight* 105), she is confronted by her limited knowledge about her own city. Together with Amina, readers are invited to remember the inequality of social classes.<sup>25</sup> Through people like Lifafa Das and his community, the novel makes readers aware of the minorities' silence and invisibility. The third example is her acceptance of a Cristian woman, Mary Pereira, into her household. Those episodes show Amina's sense of respect towards people who belong to different cultures or social classes.

Both Amina and Aziz differ from Reverend Mother, who insists on keeping the religious tutor even after knowing that he is teaching her daughter "to hate Hindus and Buddhists and Jains and Sikhs" (*Midnight* 50-51). Reverend Mother also opposes to her daughters' receiving British education. Sometimes portrayed as a fortress, Reverend Mother is self-centered on her traditions and does not admit "contaminating" herself with her husband's ideas of progress and nationalism. Through Aziz and Amina, the novel shows that cultural tolerance is not necessarily linked to encounters with other nations. Although Aziz's progressive point of view is mostly due to his foreign education, Amina, who has never left India before Partition, has learnt from her father to respect differences. The prejudice Amina has suffered because of her dark skin may also have affected her point of view on that

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<sup>25</sup> In India, social stratification is based on a caste system that divides the population into rigid hierarchical groups. The caste system is originally based on a person's work or function in society. According to a survey conducted by Pew Research Center, even people who profess a religion apart from Hinduism identify with a caste (Evans and Sahgal). Even though the Indian Constitution prohibits caste-based discrimination, marrying into other castes or into other religions is still not common in India.



subject. Her husband's cousin, Zohra, for instance, comments: "How awful to be black, cousinji, to wake every morning and see it staring at you, in the mirror to be shown proof of your inferiority!" (*Midnight* 89). Amina tends to be tolerant towards other people's religion because she knows how hard it is to be different.

Saleem has inherited from Amina and Aziz the ability to embrace diversity, which guides his conduct in the Midnight's Children Conference. However, he soon finds out that not everyone shares his ideals of cultural tolerance and national integration. In this aspect, the novel follows the postmodernist movement that celebrates "differences" over "otherness."<sup>26</sup> The concept of differences is particularly useful to understand the construction of national identities as a fluid and flexible process. If, on the one hand, *Midnight's Children* is a counter-story in relation to the Empire, on the other hand, it puts forward the multiplicity of Indian national identities by portraying people from distinct social classes, religions, gender, and political affiliations. Through the numerous characters and micro stories, the novel complicates the binary opposition between colonizers and colonized and reveals that the negotiation of differences also occurs at the national level.

In one of the several self-conscious interruptions, Saleem inserts his narrative into the Eastern storytelling tradition by comparing himself to Scheherazade, the great storyteller of *The Arabian Nights*: "In the renewed silence, I return to sheets of paper. . . ready and willing to put out of its misery a narrative which I left yesterday hanging in midair – just like as Scheherazade, depending for her very survival on leaving Prince Shahryar eaten up by curiosity, used to do night after night!" (*Midnight* 24-25). Similar to Scheherazade, Saleem's narrative is formed by a chain of tales that multiply because one story reminds Saleem of other stories and events. Likewise, his narrative is an attempt to avoid death, not in the

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<sup>26</sup> According to Linda Hutcheon, the main difference between postmodernism and postcolonialism is related to the concepts of "otherness" and "differences." Postmodernism usually highlights the "differences," whereas postcolonialism tends to analyze the colonial situation in relation to "the other," that is, the Empire, an idea that is limited by the binary opposition between "we" and "they" (Hutcheon, "Theorizing" 6).

denotative sense, but as a sign of oblivion. Thus, Saleem tells stories in order to prolong his life.

At the age of eight, Saleem feels the pressure of being a midnight's child. He also suffers a lot of bullying at his school. He fears his life is useless and feels anxious about fulfilling his purpose. In order to escape from the world of expectations, Saleem hides in a washing chest, his place of refuge. There Saleem navigates in the sea of stories by imagining himself as a character of fairy tales. He confesses: "Hatim Tai and Batman, Superman and Sinbad helped to get me through the nearly nine years" (*Midnight* 210). In the washing chest, Saleem "became Aladdin, voyaging in a fabulous cave" and "turned into the genie of the lamp" (*Midnight* 211). Inside those stories, Saleem feels safe and courageous. He becomes the hero that he wants to be in his life. Thus, stories offer him an escape from the uncertainties of his mind and, later on, become an inspiration for writing his own story.

Saleem decides to write an autobiography because he is "literally disintegrating, slowly for the moment, although there are signs of acceleration" (*Midnight* 43). His body fragmentation can also be read as a side effect of the overload of stories he carries. Saleem affirms that he is "a swallower of lives; and to know [him], just the one of [him], you'll have to swallow the lot as well" (*Midnight* 4). While Saleem writes, Saleem releases himself of the burden of carrying "too much history" (*Midnight* 43). The cracks in his skin get wider as the narrative progresses as if the body were literally opening up in order to cleanse itself.

Like the food they preserve in the pickle factory where he works, Saleem wants to be eternalized in his narrative. Hence, he dedicates his "time at the great work of preserving. Memory, as well as fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks" (*Midnight* 44). In the very last chapter, we know that there are thirty pickle jars, which coincides with the numbers of chapters. Each jar/chapter represents a year of Saleem's lifespan so far. Correspondingly, he leaves the thirty-first jar empty so that it can eventually be filled with

future events (*Midnight* 645). Writing, thus, becomes his last goal in life and, at the end of his task, he affirms: “I reach the end of my long-winded autobiography; in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories, although distortions are inevitable in both methods. We must live, I’m afraid, with the shadows of imperfection” (*Midnight* 642). Saleem is not completely satisfied with his work and further revision is necessary. However, he gets too tired for the task, and contents himself to leave his work as it is: “there is neither time nor the energy. I am obliged to offer no more than this stubborn sentence: It happened that way because that’s how it happened” (*Midnight* 644). Saleem’s statement hints at the historiographic metafictional aspect of his autobiography.<sup>27</sup> It shows that his version of the facts may be different from what has happened. Despite that, he insists on reading it as the true story of his life.

Saleem’s writing is motivated by his assurance of the importance of his life as an example to others. As Rushdie tells us, Saleem “sets out to *write himself*, in the hope that by doing so he may achieve the significance that the events of his adulthood have drained from him” (“Errata” 24). Saleem aims to leave a memoir to his son and to any other person who might be interested in his tales, he worries about presenting a text that will be a reference to younger generations: “It is possible, even probable, that I am only the first historian to write the story of my undeniably exceptional life-and-times. Those who follow in my footsteps will, however, inevitably come to this present work, this source-book, this Hadith or Purana or *Grundrisse*, for guidance and inspiration” (*Midnight* 410). To a certain extent, Saleem’s reassurance of the importance of his personal account echoes Walter Benjamin’s idea about the usefulness of stories. As Benjamin explains, “the storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of

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<sup>27</sup> In “Theorizing the Postmodern: Toward a Poetics,” Linda Hutcheon classifies as “historiographic metafiction” works that are both self-reflexive and historical (5). Those works reimagine the past taking into consideration that history is a human construct. Therefore, they should not be read for their fidelity to the so-called official history, inasmuch as they provide fictionalized versions of historical events.

those who are listening to his tale” (107). As the stories of his family help him understand his identity, Saleem is certain that his own story will inspire the people who read it. In this manner, Saleem inserts his narrative in the ancient practice of transmitting knowledge, wisdom, and advice through storytelling.

Saleem’s narrative is composed of his family tales and his own memory. However, Saleem confesses in the first chapter that he has “found from somewhere the trick of filling in the gaps in [his] knowledge, so that everything is in [his] head, down to the last detail . . . everything, and not just the few clues one stumbles across” (*Midnight* 17). This statement points to Saleem’s magical gifts that may have helped him fill the blanks of the stories he has not witnessed, but it can also suggest the fictionalization of his narrative. Intentionally or not, the fictionalization of one’s autobiography is a common part of the creative process. As Cavarero explains, one’s memory goes through a spontaneous process of storytelling: it keeps “forgetting, re-elaborating, selecting and censoring the episodes of the story that it recounts” (36). Therefore, the story one narrates is subject to alterations caused accidentally (or not) by one’s mind.

In Saleem’s narrative, there are instances when he makes changes by mistake, and there are other moments when he alters the story on purpose. As Saleem confesses several times, his narrative is not quite accurate. One example is Mahatma Gandhi’s murder that happens on the wrong date in *Midnight’s Children*. Even after Saleem perceives his mistake, he affirms that “in [his] India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time” (*Midnight* 230). As for fictional events, all the tale about Shiva’s death is the product of Saleem’s imagination. Saleem does not know what actually happens to Shiva, but he provides a bloody ending to his rival, the end that Shiva deserves to have in his writings: “[F]or the first time, I fell victim to the temptation of every autobiographer, to the illusion that since the past exists only in one’s memories and the words which strive vainly to encapsulate them, it is possible

to create past events simply by saying they occurred” (*Midnight* 619). Taking for granted that Saleem’s narrative is not intended to be accurate, minor mistakes, such as dates, or great changes, as the aftermath of his rival, do not interfere with the core of the narrative.

In “Imaginary Homelands,” Rushdie tells us that he has made Saleem an unreliable narrator to reflect his own condition as a foreigner to his homeland. Saleem’s mistakes are “the mistakes of a fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of circumstance, and his vision is fragmentary” (10). As Saleem highlights, “[I]n autobiography, as in all literature, what actually happened is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe” (*Midnight* 376). Moreover, the retelling of contemporary events, such as the Emergency, is “more partial,” Rushdie says, than the ones in the past because the consequences of the recent events may not be definitive yet (“Imaginary Homelands” 13). Being, among other things, a memory novel, *Midnight’s Children* is Rushdie’s way to reclaim his past, his childhood, his version of Bombay, and the history of his country. Saleem’s mistakes bring forward the fictionalization of Saleem’s story and the metafictional style of the novel.

Among the selected novels, Saleem is the narrator who mostly comments on his writing process, narrative choices, and personal opinions. He also provides some glimpses of the stories he intends to tell and some information about his present life, the pickle factory, and his office. In one of those interruptions, the readers are introduced to Padma, who is actually the first person to hear Saleem’s story (*Midnight* 35). Even though she does not understand why he feels compelled to write, she constantly asks for detailed information, and she keeps guiding his narrative: “I must interrupt myself. I wasn’t going to today, because Padma has started getting irritated whenever my narration becomes self-conscious, whenever, like an incompetent puppeteer, I reveal the hands holding the strings; but I simply must register a protest” (*Midnight* 83). In another instance, Saleem notices that Padma keeps

“bullying [him] back into the world of linear narrative, the universe of what-happened-next” (*Midnight* 44). As it can be seen in the passages above, Padma plays a role in his writing process: she is not a passive listener, she guides Saleem so that his story becomes as organized as she thinks it should be. Although Padma does not have a formal education, she is the one who insists on having a plausible and coherent narrative. She is a very opinionated audience who comments on the plot, questions the text, and keeps a constant dialogue with the author.

The relationship between Padma and Saleem, as audience and author, mirrors the historical relation between the high and the low classes in the colony. As Saleem belongs to a wealthy family, he has had access to good education, whereas Padma has not. Besides, Saleem does not show any disposition to teach Padma how to read. She is still denied literacy and, consequently, her voice does not have the same potency as Saleem’s. She continues to be dependable on someone else to put her personal story into written words. As a counter-narrative to the pedagogical discourse of Empire, Saleem’s autobiography subverts and appropriates the language of the colonizer. However, his narrative reflects the life of a middle-class man and, therefore, it does not entirely represent Padma.

Padma’s peripheral position represents the subaltern and the minority groups inside India. According to Nicole Thiara, Padma embodies Nehru’s failure to eradicate poverty during his government (*Salman* 35). The classical definition of the subaltern comprehends the lower classes whose voice are not heard and whose speech are inserted in elite texts, such as Saleem’s. As Gayatri Spivak explains, the subalterns are excluded from and deprived of ascending higher social strata (Foreword xx). All the information about Padma, as well as her words, reach the readers through Saleem’s narrative. Interestingly, the passages in which Padma interrupts Saleem hint at a movement towards change, at an attempt to reach a

location where Padma, and the subalterns she represents, will be able to speak directly and clearly to their own audience, instead of being shadowed by another person's voice.

This controversy does not deny the importance of Saleem's narrative as representative of his country. On the contrary, this deficiency exposes the need for diverse points of view. Literary texts should portray people from a variety of nationalities, ethnicities, genders, social classes, levels of education, political affiliations, religions, and economic statuses. As there are numerous categories, there should be a vast array of counter-stories in order to provide a more comprehensive account of the national identities found in India.

In *Midnight's Children*, we see how counter-storytelling enables Saleem to reconnect to his heritage and to ponder on his role in his family and society. Through his narrative, Saleem reflects on the uncertainties about his identity in an imaginative manner. After all, counter-stories are not meant to be a realistic testimony; they can contain traces of traditional stories, myths, and other cultural products. Saleem's narrative also represents a country that is going through the process of redefining its national identities after independence. Freed from the connection to his country, Saleem concludes his narrative by pouring his hope in future generations, which are represented by Aadam Sinai. Saleem takes a long time to understand that he does not need to "bear the burden of history" by himself, or become what he is expected to be (*Midnight* 534). Other people's expectations do not affect Saleem anymore. In fact, the story he imprints on paper becomes the ultimate version of his life journey.

#### 4. Palimpsestic Identities in *The Moor's Last Sigh*

Published in 1995, *The Moor's Last Sigh* exposes the complexity of postcolonial relations by linking India to Portuguese explorers and to Jewish refugees. The novel's protagonist Moraes Zogoiby, the Moor, is a Portuguese-Jew-Indian man, who tells his story in Spain. Although Moraes is overseas, the setting of the novel is mainly India: it changes from Cochin to Bombay, and, then to Spain, his last destination. The miscegenation of Moraes' heritage highlights the presence of other nations, besides England, in the construction of Indian identities. Through writing, which is here understood as a form of storytelling, Moraes revives old stories about himself and his family and reflects on his/their relationships, problems, secrets, and peculiar characteristics. In the present chapter, I show how storytelling enhances Moraes' perception of his relationships and of his country. I also propose a reading of Aurora's paintings as visual stories that complement the main narrative and lend another perspective to Moraes' autobiography.

The first part of the novel, "A House Divided," is centered on the first generations of the Da Gama family. Francisco da Gama is married to Epifania Menezes, and they have two sons, Camoens and Aires. Camoens is married to Isabella Souza and they have a daughter, Aurora, and Aires is married to Carmen Lobo. After Francisco dies, the company almost goes bankrupt and the two brothers are arrested by the British authorities because of a violent conflict between Menezes and Lobos. Then Isabella divides the house and the company into two: one part for her and Aurora and the other for Carmen and Epifania. Her share of the business is totally recovered before her husband and her brother-in-law go back home after nine years of imprisonment. Soon after their return, Isabella finds out she has lung cancer and she dies at the age of thirty-three. Camoens commits suicide some years later. Aurora grows up to be an independent and talented woman. She unofficially marries Abraham Zogoiby, a



poor Jewish employee in her family's company. When the Jews leave Cochin, Abraham and Aurora move to Bombay.

In the second part of the novel, "Malabar Masala," Aurora and Abraham settle in Malabar Hill, Bombay. They have four children: Christina (Ina), Inamorata (Minnie), Philomina (Mynah), and Moraes (Moor). When Moraes grows up, he meets Uma Sarasvati, who changes her self-portrayal in order to attract the people around her. She puts Moraes' family against him. She proposes a suicide pact to Moraes, which he does not accept. In the aftermath, she dies and Moraes is arrested.

The third section, "Bombay Central," starts with Moraes in prison. After being rescued by Lambajar Chandiwala in a *deus-ex-machina* moment, Moraes joins the Hinduist nationalist movement led by Raman Fielding (Mainduck). After Aurora's death, Abraham Zogoiby and Moraes reconcile. Before the bombing attack that destroys both Abraham's and Mainduck's empires, Moraes heads to Spain in order to rescue some of his mother's paintings. The last part of the novel, called "The Moor's Last Sigh," focuses on Moraes' trip to Spain and his encounter with Vasco Miranda, an eccentric artist who used to live in Elephanta (Aurora's house in Bombay). Moraes is kept captive in Miranda's fortress until Miranda has a fulminant death. Moraes concludes his story and waits for his death.

According to Alexandra Schultheis, *The Moor's Last Sigh* can be read as a "metaphor of the nation as family" in which Moraes, the first-person narrator, represents "India's complicated colonial history, encompassing not just British colonization but earlier invaders as well as recent corporate neocolonial powers" (570). The novel also deals with the notion of Mother India, which functions as a contrast to the patriarchal colonial tradition (Schultheis 570). Through Moraes and his family, Rushdie playfully rearranges traditional roles, both for women and men, and problematizes political, social, and religious issues.

Stephen Baker focuses his article “You Must Remember This: Salman Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh*” on the multiplicity of Rushdie’s narrative, how his novels are linked to one another and to historical and political events. The hybridity of postcolonial texts/subjects are represented in Rushdie’s texts by using multiple sources. Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Luther’s *Ninety-five Theses*, *Don Quixote*, and *Tristram Shandy* are some examples of the intertextual references that mirror the construction of postcolonial nations (Baker 50). Baker also claims that, in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, storytelling is related to “the construction of a self” (48). In Moraes’ case, the time he spends to write his autobiography coincides with the time he stays captive in Vasco Miranda’s fortress. When Moraes finally concludes his story, he becomes free in both physical and psychological senses.

Saleem’s and Moraes’ narratives differ in tone, inasmuch as Saleem’s story seems more optimistic about the future than Moraes’ does. Indeed, *The Moor’s Last Sigh* brings a more pessimistic view of Indian post-independence period, one filled with violence and decline (Teverson, *Salman* 161-62). In *Midnight’s Children*, Aadam Sinai represents hope for the future, a new generation that can “redeem the nation” (Teverson, *Salman* 161), but, in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Saleem’s son, now Adam Braganza, fails to be the hope of the country. Instead, he represents a new generation that “is concerned only with money and self-promotion” (Teverson, *Salman* 172). Adam’s personality proves to be too similar to his biological father’s, Shiva, and then he becomes “an agent of destruction” (Baker 51).

According to Andrew Teverson, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* share the same theme: pluralism versus intolerance (*Salman* 166). In both novels, Rushdie calls attention to the importance of pluralism by showing negative examples (Teverson, *Salman* 168). In the former novel, Mr. Buttoo and Khattam-Shud represent intolerant ruling, whereas Mainduck Fielding represents Hindu fanaticism in the latter. Being

written for a younger audience, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* offers an optimistic tone and a happy ending, which, in Teverson's view, does not accord well with Rushdie's style (*Salman* 168). In contrast, *The Moor's Last Sigh* shows the destruction of the city of Bombay after the bomb attack, and it brings the melancholy tone of a person who is in the end of his life.

Although the tone and the outcomes of those novels are different, they are appropriate to their audience and to the purpose of each story.

In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie uses Moorish Spain as a symbol of a tolerant and multicultural society where people from different cultures can harmoniously live together (Cantor 122). According to Paul Cantor, the novel criticizes the imposed colonial culture in India and points at the impossibility of establishing a pure Indian culture (124-26). Even Raman Fielding, who advocates a Hindu version of India, has an Indian name and a British surname. Through Fielding, the novel also shows how religious fanaticism can generate violence (127). Hybridity is also praised in the novel through the use of "the syntax, rhythms, and . . . the vocabulary of various Indian tongues" combined with the English language (Cantor 132). Cantor affirms that "Rushdie's own art is the best example of the cultural hybridity he celebrates" (132).

*The Moor's Last Sigh* illustrates the conflicting ideas related to multiculturalism and imperialism. At first glance, they are opposing forces, but, as the novel suggests, Moorish Spain was an imperialist domain where different cultures could coexist. That is the reason why Aurora recreates the Moor in her paintings about India. She wants to evoke that kind of social arrangement, at least the good part of that society. According to Cantor, the novel also shows how postcolonial nationalism can praise monoculturalism over multiculturalism through the Hindu fundamentalist, Raman Fielding (124). Moreover, the novel criticizes British colonization, for it imposed the English culture on India, disregarding the traditions of the inhabitants of the land (Cantor 124). That is the main difference between British and

Moorish models of colonization. Cantor remarks that the novel also criticizes empty forms of multiculturalism, that is, a kind of hybridity based on consumerism, which replaces local culture for commercial products and famous brands (Cantor 134). To exemplify this, Cantor mentions the city of Benengeli, where people from different countries live together but do not exchange any cultural traits or traditions.

The novel also mentions previous invaders who arrived in India long before the British Empire, such as Muslims and the Portuguese: “In Rushdie’s view, India is, as it were, always already invaded. Its culture is highly sedimented, the product of layer upon cultural layer deposited by successive invaders, each of whom had something to contribute to the vast synthesis that constitutes Indian civilization” (Cantor 125). In this sense, Indian identities become a palimpsest since Indian culture was written over by other peoples. Standing right in the middle of Indian and Spanish histories, Moraes and his family become the embodiment of the mixture of four different cultures: Spanish, Portuguese, Jewish, and Indian.

Telma Borges observes that Moraes is aware of the multiple identities and cultural narratives that surround him (133). The diasporic subjects bring something from their cultures to their new country. Even when they cannot entirely perform their religion and traditions in the new territory, some of those traditions are not lost in the displacement, they are saved in the memory, in the architecture, in the rituals, and in the cuisine of those diasporic people (135). In her article on the novel, Borges gives special attention to Abraham’s discovery of his hidden ancestry. The jewels he finds in the synagogue represent the link that was superficially lost, insofar as the Moorish-Jew miscegenation is a family secret. Thus, the jewels are kept as a token of the story that should not be forgotten, even when it is somehow shameful. This pride of one’s origins permeates Moraes’ narrative and reinforces the possibility of plurality and diversity of national identities.

In what follows, I explain the connection between memory and autobiographies, and the relation between the mirror stage and writing. Then, I divide the text into two sections, one for each storyteller in the novel. Moraes, who is a first-person narrator, writes his own story and the story of his family and country. Through Moraes' text, readers have access to Aurora's paintings, which are visual stories that supplement Moraes' narrative.

Considered a pioneer in the studies of the triad of identity, consciousness, and the self, John Locke deploys the classical notion of memory as a storage room and the artificial practice of memorization for its own sake (Whitehead 53). In contrast, he proposes that memory is generated by experience (Whitehead 54). Thus, ideas are not innate, but they are inserted into one's mind over time. When a person recalls past events, he/she goes through a process of recollection, an active attempt to remember something. Alternatively, reminiscence refers to an involuntary remembering of the past. In both cases, one's ideas are not available prior to the moment of recalling. Instead, the mind revives ideas when one needs them. This characteristic allows memory to structure itself like a narrative or a plot, with beginning, development, and end (Whitehead 54). The continuity of memory over time forms the self: "[I]n this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being: and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person" (Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity" §11). Here, memory is synonymous with consciousness, which determines personal identity. In sum, a person is an individual who remembers his/her past actions and, hence, can be accounted for them (Whitehead 56-57).

It is important to highlight that the act of remembering does not imply restoration because memory is not definitive. When one remembers more details, one's memory changes. Thus, memory produces a version of the original because it is a process of reflection over past actions (Whitehead 51-52). The past is the beginning of history, or one's narrative;

it sets the basis for the present, and it may dictate one's future, since it shows "the flaws and diversions as well as the normal pattern for individual growth" (L. Anderson 61). Memory is responsible for one's identity because it is the receptacle of one's stories. The return to one's memory opens the space to reflect on experiences that have led one to the present.

In Adriana Cavarero's view, memory "produces discontinuous and fragmentary texts, which, although untrustworthy and elusive, can nonetheless never be exchanged for someone else's story" (43). In other words, although memory may not be a reliable source, it offers a narrative that is always preferable to the stories of others. It is possible to approximate Cavarero's idea to counter-storytelling because this form of self-expression reflects a desire to display one's own story to the world, a desire that cannot be substituted by other people's representation about oneself. In what concerns postmodernist postcolonial works, they investigate the past with a critical point of view in order to subvert dominant narratives that are part of the collective memory of a people or a minority group.

Cavarero explains that autobiographies are a process of exposing the self to the world and that image becomes the official story of the self: "The one who is exposed generates and is generated by the life-story – this and not another – which results from such an exposition" (Cavarero 36). In other words, the autobiographical self is constituted during the process of self-exposure. In his/her storytelling, the first-person narrator may use a selection of stories to help him/her gain the audience's empathy. Because of that, some parts of an autobiography may be creations of the biographer's mind, mechanisms of concealing the truth or techniques to make the story more entertaining. As Moraes has observed, a person may not reveal all the truth while telling his/her own story. This is "the old biographer's problem: even when people are telling their own life stories, they are invariably improving on the facts, rewriting their tales, of just making them up" (Rushdie, *The Moor* 135). Interestingly, in the novels

selected for this dissertation, supposed facts and fictional stories intersect throughout the narratives.

Linda Anderson remarks that the past is a key element in psychoanalysis for “it was the past, imperfectly located as past, which created the neurotic symptom; and it was the childhood drama of love, hate and jealousy in relation to one’s parents – the Oedipus complex – which set the scene for the adult’s later affective life” (61). By reconstituting the past through storytelling, one raises one’s awareness of certain events in one’s life. Thus, writing provides the means for a person to claim his/her story. Writing can also be seen as an analogy to the mirror stage developed by Jacques Lacan in his psychoanalytical studies for two reasons.<sup>28</sup> First, the text becomes the mirror through which one sees oneself. Second, the text, which is a linguistic medium, is a reenactment of the mirror stage through language. The mirror stage is a crucial moment in a child’s construction of his/her identity or self-representation, for it is the first time that s/he sees her/ his image as a supposed whole. This experience generates a desire for wholeness. Linda Anderson interprets the mirror stage as “the founding moment for the subject and the structure through which the subject assumes his identity, as the unified image that is reflected back to him from outside, from the place of the Other” (65). The image of the mirror is “an illusion of a complete and controllable being that is the ‘self’” (D. Hall 80).

Linda Anderson continues explaining “what is ‘known’ as the self is the cohesiveness of a reflection which the subject fantasizes as real” (65). This image externalizes one’s desire for coherence and wholeness, aspects that will never be fulfilled. The mirror stage also allows the child to recognize the “Other,” which means both the unconscious and “the other to whom the subject directs his speech and who is thus the locus of meaning and identification”

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<sup>28</sup> The mirror stage comprehends the period from six to eighteen months, in which an infant first recognizes himself/herself in the mirror and assumes that exterior image as his/her identity (Lacan, “The Mirror” 1-2).

(L. Anderson 65). At this moment, he recognizes himself through the perspective of the “Other.” Likewise, writing becomes a kind of reenactment of this infant experience, for it produces a fictionalized version of the self (L. Anderson 65).

The subject is only aware of the unity of his/her body from an outside source (D. Hall 80), which creates a tension, a friction between the subject’s fragmented self and his/her urge for unity. The next stage of self-identification is language-oriented. According to Lacan, we create our selves through language by becoming an object (in the symbolic order). This process requires a distance between the self and his/her story, which inevitably leads to a fictionalization of that being. What is depicted in the text is not the self per se, but a representation of it, which is a reenactment of the mirror stage through language. Lacan states: “I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming” (“The Function” 64). In Lacan’s view, language concerns evocation rather than information. The self is constituted through language in the act of communication. Thus, the dialogue with the other, or “the response of the other,” as Lacan puts it, is more important than the message per se. In terms of literature, this function of language highlights the purposiveness of stories. Even when they do not have a moral, they are written to convey a certain message and they expect a response from its audience. Psychologically speaking, in counter-storytelling the response may be two-fold, for it also involves the transformation of the narrator (in stories), or the person who writes about himself/herself, and the readers who, by identification, can see themselves in the text.

Another remarkable point in Lacan’s theory is “the illusion of wholeness and mastery that language provides” (D. Hall 80-81). Language gives the self a means to construct identity, but this process does not reach a conclusion. Writing shares with psychoanalysis



what Lacan thinks to be one of the goals of the latter, which is “the realization by the subject of his history in his relation to a future” (“The Function” 65). The main purpose of writing is not to describe the narrator accurately. Instead, its central concern is the recognition that the narrator is building another layer of signification through writing.

As one’s identity is in constant mutation, it is unlikely to reach a whole and coherent state. Besides, life experiences continuously interfere in the formation of the self. The construction of identity is an ongoing process of self-recognition and self-knowledge; it is a process that ends when one dies, and even then, it does not mean that it is completed. In *Midnight’s Children*, the thirty-first jar, which is left empty, represents openness, uncertainty of the future, and desire for completion. In contrast, the tone of the narrative in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* gives readers a sense of closure.

#### Moraes’ Palimpsestic Identity

The last born in the Zogoiby household, Moraes has the strongest connection to Aurora. He is also the only child who Aurora breastfed (*The Moor* 147). Because of his club hand, Moraes receives more attention from his mother than his sisters do. In addition, he is the only one who poses for her paintings. His physical deformity seems to explain Aurora’s decision to put Moraes onto canvas:

[S]oon after I was born, she began the series of major canvases with which she is most strongly associated; those works whose name (“the Moor paintings”) is the same as mine, in which my growing-up is more meaningfully documented than in any photograph album, and which will keep us joined to each other for ever and a day, no matter how far, and how violently, our lives drove us apart. (*The Moor* 179)

Even though Aurora's visual story is somehow faithful to Moraes' life, it contains plenty of fictional and historical references. Thus, her works are a mixture of reality and fiction, which may be an allusion to a writer's craft.

In addition to his physical deformity, Moraes ages twice faster than everyone does. Moraes' aging disorder may be the fulfilment of Aurora's desire to have a child who grows up quickly (*The Moor* 141). For the gossipy tongues, he may (or not) be the product of Aurora's uncountable night away from home with Nehru (*The Moor* 175-77). For those who prefer a scientific explanation, he has a premature-ageing disorder that produces "short-life cells" (*The Moor* 145). When Moraes tells his story, he is thirty-six years old with the appearance of a seventy-two-year-old man (*The Moor* 145-46). According to Schultheis, Moraes' ageing disorder represents the growth of the population in Bombay in the first decade after Indian independence (580). In a larger scale, his disorder can also be understood as an exposure of the contradictory nature of the Indian political situation. Despite being an ancient civilization, India was officially recognized as an independent nation in 1947, which is a recent period in comparison to Indian historical register.

Moraes feels dislocated at home because he thinks he is the only "ugly," "malformed," and "wrong" person in the family (*The Moor* 153). Besides, Moraes has a hard time accepting his body because it develops faster than his self. This asynchronism impairs Moraes' self-perception and his social interactions. When he grows up, Moraes becomes a handsome man, but he still feels ugly. The sense of inadequacy is the result of other people's judgment on him, of his own feeling of dislocation, and of his desire to be "normal." In the eyes of the people in the racecourse, Moraes is "misshapen," "a freaky," "a shame on the house," "almost like an idiot" (*The Moor* 241). Those derogatory words affect his self-esteem and make him an easy prey for Uma Sarasvati. This episode demonstrates how other people's narrative can be unfair. It reaches a point when Moraes questions if the gossip about him

describes his identity. Moraes only sees a better picture of his identity when he writes his story. At the age of twenty, Moraes starts acting in accordance with his appearance; what he sees in the mirror becomes his self, or he thinks it does (*The Moor* 241). When Moraes meets Uma Sarasvati, he perceives that his younger mind is his “true” self (*The Moor* 245). Moraes’ identity is a palimpsest in which his appearance does not correspond to his consciousness.

In the end of his life, Moraes is forced to write the story of his life. This task becomes a maneuver to delay his death, for Vasco Miranda intends to kill him after he finishes it (*The Moor* 433), a predicament that echoes Scheherazade’s in *The Arabian Nights*. Furthermore, writing becomes an opportunity to reconcile emotionally with his mother, who dies before they restore their relationship. To exemplify this, we can remember the passage in which Moraes acknowledges having had a happy childhood in Elephanta: “I would finally put it here, I would say that my joy in life was born in our collaboration, in the intimacy of those private hours, when she talked of everything under the sun” (*The Moor* 221). While he revisits the past, Moraes revives the feeling of being loved and secure under Aurora’s shelter. However, this feeling will remain a desire because the past itself cannot be regained.

Like Saleem in *Midnight’s Children*, writing, which here is understood as a form of storytelling, frees Moraes from the burden of the past: “So, in writing this, I must peel off history, the prison of the past. It is time for a sort of ending, for the truth about myself to struggle out, at last, from under my parents’ stifling power; from under my own black skin” (*The Moor* 137). Once more, Rushdie characterizes the past as a burden that prevents the main character from moving forward. It does not mean that Moraes will forget the past altogether. On the contrary, writing becomes a way to remember the past and learn from it in order to have a better present and future. It offers some time for reflection on what has taken Moraes up to his current situation. Writing provides him with the means to ponder on his life,

to overcome his troubled relationship with his parents, and to understand his path as an individual.

A great portion of Moraes' narrative is based on the stories he has heard throughout his life. Moraes is aware that some of his family's stories rely more on invented tales than on supposed facts. He prefers the invented versions, for they reveal a great deal of the character of his family members (*The Moor* 85-86). When Moraes writes those stories, he frees himself from the burden of being the only one who knows them. As Moraes puts it: "I tell them as they have come down to me, polished and fantasticated by many re-tellings. These are old ghosts, distant shadows, and I tell their tales to be done with them; they are all I have left and so I set them free" (*The Moor* 11). Altering elements of a story is a common characteristic of oral storytelling especially because, in oral (re-)production, the narrator may change some details or add new elements. Hence, oral stories are not fixed as the written forms, such as novels and short stories. By using a medium that does not usually accept alterations, Moraes guarantees the preservation of his memories.

In what concerns Moraes' primary audience, two people read his narrative: the first is Vasco Miranda and the second is Aoi Uë, a Japanese painter who is also imprisoned by Vasco Miranda. Whereas Vasco Miranda enjoys reading the story of the Zogoiby's fall into disgrace, Aoi Uë feels horrified by Moraes' story. Moraes comments, "She was frightened by my words, by what I set down on paper" (*The Moor* 427). Although she is a minor character in the narrative, she helps Moraes endure the period of captivity. Using story as a metaphor for life, Moraes laments that they "met so near the end of [their] stories" (*The Moor* 422). Neither Vasco nor Aoi Uë interferes in the writing process. That differs from Saleem and Padma's relationship in *Midnight's Children*, where narrator and audience maintain a constant dialogue.

Moraes sometimes directs his speech to the readers by using vocatives, such as “ladies” (*The Moor* 4), “ladies and gents” (44), “reader” (292), “you” (4). In those moments, the narrator’s voice can be confused with Rushdie’s. Likewise, the voice of an unknown addressee also appears in italics: “*What’s that you say?*” (4), “*And all this from a peppercorn!*” (5), “*Jealousy? – Of what, of whom, of which?*” (*The Moor* 236). Intended to hold readers’ attention, this imaginary dialogue between readers and narrator/author exposes the fictional construction of the text and rejects the illusion of reality praised by traditional realism (Lodge 10). According to David Lodge, when an author reveals his/her presence in the text, he/she suspends the limits of verisimilitude and opens a space for his own historical and metafictional reflections (12). In *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, those authorial reflections are usually connected to Aurora, who represents the author and his creative work.

In a review for *The Nation*, William Deresiewicz observed that family is one of Rushdie’s favorite subjects. Indeed, the four novels in the present selection tell stories of Indian families. In *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Moraes traces his story back to his great-grandparents who together represent ideas of colonization and nationalism. The title of the first part of the novel refers to the Cochin house that is literally divided by Belle after the conflict between Lobos and Menezes, but it also alludes to a clash of ideas: Francisco, Camoens, and Belle want the independence of India, while Epifania, Aires, and Carmen prefer British colonization.

Despite coming from an average family, Epifania Menezes marries Francisco da Gama, who belongs to a rich family.<sup>29</sup> They have opposite attitudes, personalities, and values. Epifania is an authoritarian figure who supports colonialism. As “the troublemaker-in-chief” (*The Moor* 33), Epifania causes a great deal of tension in the family. She sucks life

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<sup>29</sup> The name Epifania comes from a Latin word that means “an appearance or manifestation of a divine being” (“Epiphany”). Her name emphasizes her position as a Christian devotee.

out of her husband, subjugates Carmen, and declares war against Belle and Aurora. In many passages, she is pictured as a monster, a witch, or a snake whose poison contaminates the rest of the family. Epifania's monstrosity seems to be related to colonialism. She mimics the colonizers who subjugate the colony's population and extract from the land all its treasure. She represents the unbalanced relations between the Empire and India. During an argument with Francisco, she defends the crown: "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" (*The Moor* 18). She attributes her good life to British imperialism and she sees the colonizers as benefactors. Epifania seems oblivious of the problems of her country and she despises any nationalist ideas or movements. This disagreement becomes a watershed in the story, for Epifania and Francisco barely speak to each other in the end of their lives. Accordingly, her death stands for the end of the colonialist period and its political dominance in India.

In contrast, Francisco da Gama is a virtuous man and an exceptional businessperson. He is also a sponsor of the arts who believes that "[o]ld beauty is not enough . . . Old palaces, old behaviour, old gods. These days the world is full of questions, and there are new ways to be beautiful" (*The Moor* 16-17). Although Francisco refers to art in general, his statement can also be read as a metafictional commentary. It dismisses the grandeur of classical traditions in favor of innovation and creativity. Moreover, Francisco da Gama is a liberal intellectual who participates in nationalist movements. He joins the campaign for an independent India and funds a pro-independence league. He publishes a paper on fields of consciousness that supposedly store human practical and moral memory (*The Moor* 20). The bad reception of the paper marks his transition from the public sphere to the privacy of his house, and then to his death.

The relations between Britain and its colonies are not a simple division as it seems to be at first glance. The novel exposes this issue in the characterization of Camoens, Moraes' grandfather. Camoens, whose name alludes to a Portuguese poet, represents the hybrid nature of colonial identities because his ideals and tastes are oxymoronic: he is a nationalist who likes reading English poetry and a millionaire who defends Marxism (*The Moor* 32). When describing Camoens, Moraes confesses that to him "the doubleness in Grandfather Camoens reveal his beauty; his willingness to permit the coexistence within himself of conflicting impulses is the source of his full, gentle humaneness" (*The Moor* 32). This passage shows that the co-existence of distinct cultural traits is acceptable, and it does not compromise the struggle for independence. After Camoens' flirtation with communism, he becomes a Nehru advocate, but this time he keeps a distance from the spotlight, mainly to avoid repeating his father's public humiliation.

Belle, or (Queen) Isabella is described as "tall, beautiful, brilliant, brave, hard-working, powerful, victorious," even though she is "no angel, no wings or halo in her wardrobe" (*The Moor* 44). While Camoens is in prison, Belle starts wearing pants, smoking, drinking, and being "shamelessly unfaithful" (*The Moor* 44). She defends Nehru's nationalist ideas of "progress and modernity" (*The Moor* 54). Her behavior and beliefs are not constrained by the expected manners of a good woman of that time. This description evinces the beauties and the flaws of her personality.

Even though Belle is not depicted as an exemplary mother, she is the first character to embody the image of Mother India. When Belle is in her deathbed, Camoens tells her about *the dawning of a new world, Belle, a free country, above religion because secular, above class because socialist, above caste because enlightened, above hatred because loving, above vengeance because forgiving, above tribe because unifying, above language because many-tongued, above colour because multi-colored, above poverty*

*because victorious over it, above ignorance because literate, above stupidity because brilliant, freedom, Belle, the freedom express, soon soon we will stand upon that platform and cheer the coming of the train. (The Moor 51)*

This passage demonstrates how Belle shares the same characteristics of Camoens' ideal nation: secular, socialist, loving, forgiving, and brilliant. After Belle's death, when Aurora fills the walls of her room with fictional and real characters, and "put[s] history on the walls" (*The Moor* 59), she paints Belle as Mother India. This painting inaugurates Aurora's career and sets the tone and the theme of her subsequent works. Aurora, who inherits Belle's beauty, free spirit, and nationalist ideals, eventually replaces Belle as the representation of Mother India.<sup>30</sup>

Concerning history, *The Moor's Last Sigh* shows the aftermath of Indian independence, the rise of religious fundamentalism and capitalism in the 1980s and 1990s. *The Moor's Last Sigh* uncovers another layer in the Indian colonial past, moving a step backward. Cantor has explained that

[o]ne cannot say that the British presence in India introduced an unprecedented element of heterogeneity into an otherwise homogeneous culture. In Rushdie's view, India is, as it were, always already invaded. Its culture is highly sedimented, the product of layer upon cultural layer deposited by successive invaders, each of whom had something to contribute to the vast synthesis that constitutes Indian civilization. (125)

Much is said about the British imperialism in the subcontinent, but nations, such as India, have a long history of invasions that influenced their traditions, religions, and languages. Moraes, thus, epitomizes the hybridity found in India in a mixture more complicated than

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<sup>30</sup> The name Aurora is a reference to "the Roman goddess of the dawn" ("Aurora"). Aurora represents a new beginning for India, a new way to see her country, after a long period of colonization.



Saleem's ancestry in *Midnight's Children*: "I, however, was raised neither as Catholic nor as Jew. I was both, and nothing: a jewholic-anonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel cur. I was – what's the word these days? – atomized. Yessir: a real Bombay mix" (*The Moor* 104). Moraes descends from the Portuguese on the part of his mother, and from moors and Jews on his father's side. Even though Moraes is not a Hindi, as the majority of the Indian population is, he is the "true" son of his nation.

The third part of the novel is dedicated to Bombay, the city that symbolizes the idea of multicultural India. When describing Bombay, Moraes alludes to the Ocean of Stories to illustrate the excess of nationalities, languages, and cultures. Bombay "was an ocean of stories; we were all its narrators, and everybody talked at once" (*The Moor* 350). Moraes considers Bombay the center of the country because of its origin as "the bastard child of a Portuguese-English wedding" and because of its ability to embrace "all Indias" (*The Moor* 350). Bombay becomes a metonym for the multiple voices and hybrid identities of the Indian nation.

Hybridity permeates the construction of the novel not only in what concerns its content but also its form. *The Moor's Last Sigh*, especially in the third part, exemplifies Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia.<sup>31</sup> As Bakhtin explains, the novel form portrays "a diversity of social speech, types (sometimes even diversity of language) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (262). The acknowledgement of heteroglossia, as Bakhtin points out, is the first step in the "processes of decentralization and disunification" of the dominant languages (272); and the novel is the genre that, by accepting multiple styles, speeches, and voices, allows all languages to coexist and interact with one another. In Moraes' narratives, the speeches of the characters, the descriptions of the crowd, the distinct

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<sup>31</sup> Heteroglossia is the variations within a language produced by social groups in relation to the standard languages (Renfrew 97).

ideas of nationalism represent together the several voices and points of view in the text. The heteroglossia of the text and, by analogy, of the city of Bombay counters the monologic discourse of the Empire and offers new ways to see Indians.

Bombay in *The Moor's Last Sigh* witnesses plenty of strikes, violent conflicts, and eventually, a bomb attack that destroys almost all the city and kills most of the remaining characters. Moraes notices that, after the Emergency, his country becomes dangerous even to an Indian, at least “the wrong sort of Indian, anyway – wearing the wrong sort of head-dress, speaking the wrong language, dancing the wrong dances, worshipping the wrong gods, travelling in the wrong company” (*The Moor* 414). In this passage, Moraes refers to the rise of the Hindu nationalist movement that polarizes the city. According to Thiara, in the novel, “the idea of a hybrid, diverse India is depicted as increasingly endangered by Hindu nationalism’s attempt to re-create India as a pure Hindu nation” (*Salman* 172-73). This idea is clear in the characterization of Raman Fielding, who epitomizes the dangers of religious fanaticism. For Fielding, the golden age of India was before the invasions. However, his desire to establish a pure India is an illusion because the layers of history and cultural encounters cannot be removed from the national identities of the country. In fact, Fielding’s nationalism hides his search for power, mainly because his actions are not intended to help Indian society. Ultimately, *The Moor's Last Sigh* shows that Saleem’s dream of a unified country has failed.

Right before the bomb attacks that partially destroy the city of Bombay, Moraes heads to Spain. He feels dislocated before arriving in his destination. He confesses, “The place, language, people and customs I knew had all been removed from me by the simple act of boarding this flying vehicle” (*The Moor* 383). Moraes lists in this sentence what he considers “the four anchors of the soul,” and “the roots of [his] self” (*The Moor* 383). Those factors are

more related to India than to his personal traits and abilities. They reinforce the importance of India in the construction of his identity.

Although Rushdie's novels generally praise the beauties of cultural encounters, *The Moor's Last Sigh* draws attention to an empty form of hybridity caused by capitalism and globalization. Named after the narrator of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Benengeli, Moraes' final destination, houses many hybrid subjects whose multicultural life is based on consuming international brands (Cantor 134). Nicknamed as "parasites" by the locals, those expatriates maintain their native language, eat at fancy restaurants, and shop in fancy stores (*The Moor* 390). The problem of this cosmopolitan life lies in its superficiality. Cantor states that

the commodity culture of capitalism abstracts from the local, from anything that roots a people in their soil, and substitutes instead a world of falsely universal brand names, epitomized by the fast-food chains that spring up everywhere and belong nowhere. This commercial cosmopolitanism *denatures* human beings; by ignoring all local customs, it dissolves their sense of cultural identity, which is always anchored in a larger sense of community. (134)

Those people do not embrace the experience of living in another country, that is, they do not interact with the locals, and neither do they try to learn the Spanish language and culture. Moraes wonders if those expatriates are the new Moors. Nevertheless, despite their imperialist ruling, the hybridity of the Moorish period lies on ideas of tolerance and integration, things that are not found in Benengeli. In fact, not even India is described as a safe nest for hybrid subjects. On the contrary, the novel is cautionary of the instability of a society rooted in religious fundamentalism.

After concluding his story, Moraes wanders through the streets of Benengeli with the manuscript in his hands. It becomes the conclusion of a difficult life journey, almost like a testament or a confession (*The Moor* 4). Moraes cares to leave the manuscript in a place

where it would be found, probably by the police officer named Medina, who will eventually find two dead bodies in Vasco's house. His story has a sad tone, reinforced by the use of phrases/sentences such as "final surrender," "a set of rowdy tunes for the wake" (4), and "I left my story nailed to the landscape in my wake" (*The Moor* 433). This melancholy tone leads readers to infer that Moraes is dying, but the novel does not confirm this idea.

In the opening and final scenes of the novel, Moraes is in a graveyard in the woods, where he can finally see The Alhambra Palace, the representation of Aurora's idea of hybridity: "*that most profound of our needs, . . . our need for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of the boundaries of the self*" (*The Moor* 433). Through Aurora's stories and paintings, Moraes has learnt to cherish his multicultural background. Mooristan is a metaphor for a tolerant society where the plurality of its people is respected. In this sense, it resembles Homi Bhabha's definition of the "in-between space," a moment/process in which the facets of identities, be they personal or national, can be constructed without the constraints of discrimination.<sup>32</sup> In the novel, Mooristan illustrates a location of dialogue and collaboration, where national identities and their particularities are elaborated.

Ironically, Moraes who ages faster than anyone else has outlived all his family members. The last of the Da Gama-Zogoiby family, Moraes knows that if he died without telling his story, it would be lost forever. Recording his narrative on paper guarantees its survival, its afterlife. Differently from Saleem, Moraes never mentions any disposition to write for younger generations or to expose the problems of his country. Despite citing historical events and figures, Moraes' main objective is the revision of a life of suffering, struggles, and disappointment. By writing his own story, Moraes abide by the long tradition

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<sup>32</sup> Bhabha uses the term "in-between space" to refer to a liminal location between cultures where hybrid identities, be they individual or collective, can be elaborated. According to Bhabha, the idea of a pure culture is illusory. All cultures are influenced by the encounters with other cultures, in a continuous process of hybridization (Huddart, "Why Bhabha?" 4-5).

of telling stories in order to avoid oblivion and to remain living through words. After all, as Moraes states, “In the end, stories are what’s left of us, we are no more than the few tales that persist” (*The Moor* 110).

### Aurora’s Counter-storytelling on Canvas

Moraes is not the only storyteller in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. His mother Aurora also tells stories, but she uses a different medium. In fact, Moraes only starts writing in the end of his life, whereas Aurora has always been an artist. Even though readers do not have direct access to Aurora’s voice in the novel, she is considered a storyteller here because her paintings tell the stories of her life, her family, and her country. She also uses art to express her fears, her emotions, and her uncertainties about the future. She even conceals the portrait of her murderer in her last and unfinished work. The stories Aurora puts on canvas supplement Moraes’ narrative, for the descriptions of her paintings offer another point of view to his story, especially in the middle chapters, in which the stories on canvas parallel Moraes’ words. In sum, the ekphrastic descriptions of her works put forward another layer of interpretation and reveal things about Moraes that he just understands when he writes his story.<sup>33</sup>

According to J. M. Coetzee, Aurora is “in many ways the emotional center of the book.” She occupies a great portion of the narrative and her paintings become a visual complement to Moraes’ story. She is described as the “most illustrious of our modern artists, a great beauty who was also the most sharp-tongued woman of her generation” (*The Moor* 5). She inherits a nationalist agenda from her parents, and the free spirit from her mother Isabella, but she develops a talent for art that is all hers. Most of her works are based on the

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<sup>33</sup> Ekphrasis is a written description of a work of art, which does not need to be an actual painting or sculpture (Mikics 98). One of the most known examples is Homer’s *Iliad*, which brings the description of Achilles’ shield. The main purpose of this technique is to help readers visualize the work of art. See the entry “Ekphrasis” in David Mikics’ *A New Handbook of Literary Terms*.

episodes of her family life, whose “deepest mysteries usually ended up in oils-on-canvas, hanging on a gallery wall” (*The Moor* 13).

Aurora does not have a good relationship with her grandmother Epifania, who always criticizes her for being too tall, too troubled, or too similar to her mother Belle. Ironically, Epifania is indirectly responsible for the discovery of Aurora’s talent. After Belle’s death, Aurora starts to open the windows during the cold nights and to throw away some objects, little statues, and decoration items. When Epifania decides to punish the household employees for the disappearance of her objects, Aurora confesses her misdeeds. She is grounded in her room for a week. During her confinement, she paints the history of her family and her country on the walls and the ceiling of her bedroom. In fact, Aurora starts painting long before that punishment. After her mother becomes busy with the family company, Aurora spends her lonely time drawing and coloring. She has never told it to anyone apart from the maid who gets the materials for her. Only after the punishment does Aurora decide to tell her secret to her father, Camoens. As she grows up, Aurora becomes an artist, a representative of her country’s history and culture, and the most brilliant visual storyteller of her generation.

Initially, painting is a kind of therapy for Aurora, since it is her way to express her feelings, to relieve her pain and anger. Aurora paints her entire room as an act of mourning her mother. She paints the Red series after Abraham promises their first son to his mother, Flora Zogoiby (*The Moor* 115). Once she promises not to have any intimacy with him while his mother remains alive, Aurora uses painting as a cope mechanism to endure the time apart from her husband’s bed: “Aurora continued, contrastingly, to blossom. Genius was being born in her, filling the empty spaces in her bed, her heart, her womb. She needed no-one but herself” (*The Moor* 116). Storytelling, here in the form of visual art, provides Aurora with a means to deal with her emotions and to reflect on her personal relationships.

On canvas, Aurora reimages Indian history and brings forward its hybrid ancestry. She also puts on the spotlight polemical aspects of the Indian society of her times. For instance, the painting *The Kissing of Abhas Ali Baig* (1960), portraying a kiss on the cheek involving a random girl and the batsman Baig during a cricket game (228), shows the still present influence of the English sports in India and the taboo against public display of affection. This particular work “had become a state-of-India painting, a snapshot of cricket’s arrival at the heart of the national consciousness, and more controversially, a generational cry of sexual revolt” (*The Moor* 229). Although most of her works are about Moraes, they also externalize Aurora’s desire for a secular India that embraces its hybridity, a desire for a less polarized country where East and West mingle into one. In her “Aurorized” version of history, the excess becomes a more suitable expression of the Indian identities than the strict definitions of Raman Fielding (Hindu fundamentalism) and Epifania Menezes (colonialism). Always provocative and politically engaged, Aurora’s works become a visual expression of counter-storytelling, a palimpsestic version of the Indian history of her times.

Eventually, Aurora becomes the center of artistic nationalist movements and one of the most famous figures in her country. She even stays in jail for two years due to her participation in Quit India Resolution. During the manifestations in 1942, Aurora anonymously draws a series of sketches in charcoal, known as Chipkali or lizard pictures. Those pictures show the everyday life of average people involved in the strikes:

[T]he face-slapping quarrels of naked children at a tenement standpipe, the grizzled despair of idling workers smoking beedis on the doorsteps of locked-up pharmacies, the silent factories, . . . the toughness of women with saris pulled over their heads, . . . the panic in the eyes of lathi-charging policemen . . . the elated tension of the striking sailors at the gates to the naval yards . . . and beneath all this was her own sense of the inadequacy of the world, of its failure to live up to her expectations, so that her own

disappointment with reality, her anger at its wrongness, mirrored her subjects', and made her sketches not merely reportorial, but personal . . . . (*The Moor* 130-31)

Aurora portrays the city as she sees it, without any embellishment, without fantastical characters or other kinds of artistic allusions. In her sketches, she portrays the so-called real life and the difficulties of lower-class people. Even though the pictures do not cause the political impact Aurora and her agent Kekoo Mody have predicted, her works inspire a group of young artists who call themselves the Chipkalist Movement (*The Moor* 131-32).

Surprisingly, some years later, Aurora reveals her authorship because she does not want to have any followers that would link her works to the realist trend that followed Indian independence.

In the first decade after independence, most Indian artists used naturalism in order to describe the nation that was reborn (*The Moor* 173).<sup>34</sup> Aurora is not sure if she should follow that trend of “selfless, dedicated – even patriotic – mimesis” (*The Moor* 173), mainly because it does not accord well with her idea of hybrid India and her preference for fantastical characters: “Aurora fell into a deep creative confusion, a semi-paralysis born of an uncertainty not merely about realism but about the nature of the real itself” (*The Moor* 173). The problem here is not the use of naturalism per se, but the reason why she would use it. Whereas Aurora finds realism appropriate to illustrate the strikes, it is not, in her opinion, the best way to image the Indian nation. Aurora feels reluctant to compromise her style just to conform to the naturalist trend.

Aurora finds an answer for this issue in the works of other Indian artists who mixed realism with fantasy. Some examples are the Bengali film director Sukumar Sen and the

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<sup>34</sup> Following the realist movement, naturalist works offer a detailed representation of the world. However, naturalism advocates that nature and social environment determine human experience. It also rejects the possibility of a spiritual world. For more information, see M. H. Abrams' “Realism and Naturalism” in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (302-305).



writers Mushi Premchand, Sadat Hasan Manto, Mulk Raj Anand, and Ismat Chughtai.<sup>35</sup>

Manto's "Toba Tek Singh," also the name of a city in Pakistan, is particularly enlightening to her because it tells the story of

the partition of the sub-continent's lunatics at the time of the larger Partition. One of the crazies, formerly a prosperous landlord, was caught in a no-man's land of the soul, unable to say whether his Punjabi home town lay in India or Pakistan, and in his madness, which was also the madness of the time, he retreated into a kind of celestial gibberish. (*The Moor* 174)

Aurora gets so impressed by Manto's story that she paints its final scene, a painting that, according to Moraes, is "her finest work of the period" (*The Moor* 174). Those writers are not only Aurora's inspiration to deal with realism, they are also literary references for Rushdie, who uses the fantastical as a relief in the realist novel.

In this self-reflexive moment of the novel, we see a critique not against naturalism itself, but in relation to the obligation of following popular trends or the rigid style of a genre. Aurora's reluctance to adapt to the mimetic style of naturalism reinforces the idea that an artist should be faithful to his/her truth, which in her case is an "epic-fabulist manner" (*The Moor* 174). Eventually, Vasco Miranda reminds her that Indians "are not a nation of 'averagis' . . . but a magic race" (*The Moor* 174). He convinces her to take Moraes, her "fantastic, un-real son" as the center of her works and, then, her career launches. Instead of rejecting realism altogether, Aurora mixes it with her fantastical world in order to offer an alternative vision of India, one focused not on the present per se, but on India's long history of intercultural connections. Aurora also portrays current national events, family problems, and her complicated relationship with Moraes.

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<sup>35</sup> Mushi Premchand is known for consolidating the novel genre in Urdu and Hindi literatures. Saada Hasan Manto was an Urdu writer who wrote mostly short stories. Mulk Raj Anand was the first Indian writer to write in English. He usually portrayed the lives of the lower classes in his novels and short stories. Ismat Chughtai is the only woman on the list. She was an Urdu novelist who advocated human rights and feminism.

Her most remarkable works are a series of canvases dedicated to Moraes. Also known as “The Moor Paintings,” this series is divided into three phases: early pictures (1957- 1977), the great/ high years (1977-1981), and the dark Moors, dated from Moraes’ exile to Aurora’s death (218). The first Moors paintings are “charcoal sketches, watercolours, pastels and finally a large work in oils” (*The Moor* 220). They have bright colors and a lot of light. The first phase illustrates Moraes’ happy childhood in Elephanta and the intimacy between mother and son. The main work of the first period, called *A Light to Lighten the Darkness*, portrays Aurora and Moraes “as a godless madonna and child” (*The Moor* 220). According to Moraes, this canvas “revealed the magnificence, the grandeur of her falling-out with the world, and her determination to transcend and redeem its imperfections through art” (*The Moor* 220). She uses bright colors and beautiful images to deviate the attention from his club hand, which is substituted by “a glowing light” in this particular picture (*The Moor* 220). This painting shows Aurora’s willingness to overcome Moraes’ malformed hand. This transcended transformation of her characters is repeated in subsequent works. In *Courtship*, both mother and son are portrayed as peacocks. In *Moor and Tussy* – the Moor is Karl Marx and Aurora is his daughter Eleanor (*The Moor* 224). In *To Die Upon a Kiss*, Aurora and Moraes become Desdemona and the Moor, in a clear reference to the death scene of Shakespeare’s *Othello*. On her canvases, Aurora creates an imaginary world where Moraes is not limited by his deficiency.

After she paints *Othello*, Aurora starts a series of Boabdil paintings, her own “Aurorised Version” of his story (*The Moor* 225). In the second phase, Spain meets India in a fictional space that Aurora calls Mooristan and Palimpstine: a “Place where worlds collide, flow in and out of one another, and washofy away. . . . One universe, one dimension, one country, one dream, bumpo’ing into another, or being under, or on top of” (*The Moor* 226). To create this new world, Aurora blends elements of Indian architecture with Spanish

buildings. She also uses historical, fantastical, and current characters. She paints “monsters, elephant-deities, [and] ghosts” and furnishes the sea with “fish, drowned ships, mermaids, treasure, [and] kings” (*The Moor* 226). Aurora constantly plays with the limits of land and water, which, in her pictures, represent England and India, respectively. This mingling of elements symbolizes the hybridity of Indian identities:

Around and about the figure of the Moor in his hybrid fortress she wove her vision, which in fact was a vision of weaving, or more accurately interweaving. In a way these were polemical pictures, in a way they were an attempt to create a romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation; she was using Arab Spain to re-imagine India, and this land-sea-scape in which the land could be fluid and the sea stone-dry was her metaphor – idealized? Sentimental? Probably – of the present, and the future, that she hoped would evolve. (*The Moor* 227)

Although these works have the Moor as the central figure, they are about India and its intercultural encounters. Her works depict India’s layers of history and cultural diversity. For Aurora, India has always been a hybrid nation, even before the arrival of the British colonizers. However, this mythical image of a harmonious India remains in the realm of dreams, for Moraes’ narrative proves that India does not reach Aurora’s expectation about cultural tolerance.

In the second phase, Aurora’s paintings become gradually tragic, distorted, and dark, especially after Moraes’ exile from Elephanta. The first picture of the high phase, *Moor and Ina’s Ghost Look into the Abyss*, depicts the Moor as a sighing powerless figure looking at Ina’s dead body. This painting shows the agony of a mother losing her daughter prematurely. In terms of imagery, the limits of land and sea “ceased to be a permeable frontier. Now she painted it as a harshly-delineated zig-zag crack, into which the land was pouring along with the ocean” (*The Moor* 235). This picture foreshadows the dark years that would come in

Aurora's life and in her country. It also sets the tone for the second series: "those high-energy, apocalyptic canvases . . . her larger, prophetic, even Cassandran fears for the nation, her fierce grief at the sourness of what had once, at least in an India of dreams, been sweet as sugar-cane juice" (*The Moor* 236). Although Moraes accurately interprets Aurora's paintings as a prophecy of the political turmoil that eventually plagues the city of Bombay, he is unable to notice that they are also a warning about his girlfriend, Uma Sarasvati.

*Mother-Naked Moor Watches Chimène's Arrival* depicts Moraes' separation from his mother due to Uma Sarasvati, who assumes the form of Chimène in Aurora's paintings (*The Moor* 246-47). Based on this picture, Moraes starts assuming that art does not always imitate the so-called reality, for what he sees on canvas differs from his everyday life. In Moraes' point of view, the painting reveals that "art, ultimately, was not life; [but] what might feel truthful to the artist, for example, this tale of malevolent usurpation, of a pretty witch come to separate a mother from her son – did not necessarily bear the slightest connection to events and feelings and people in the real world" (*The Moor* 247). Despite his statement, an attentive reader is able to perceive that, in this particular case, Aurora's canvases show a version of the story that Moraes insists on ignoring. From this painting on, the Moor becomes an abstract figure and his mother Ayxa, now usually painted in black, remains in a distant position. In contrast, Chimène, painted in brilliant white, shares the scenes with the Moor. Toward the end of the high period, Aurora uses fewer colors and more gray, black, and white tones. Furthermore, the contrast between Aurora's paintings and Moraes' story allows readers to predict Moraes' fall before he reaches this moment in the narrative.

The last phase of Aurora's paintings, called "The Moor in Exile," or "Dark Moors," breaks with her previous styles. The predominant characteristic is the use of collage, the technique of assembling several fragments of random materials, such as paper, plastic, and fabric, on canvas. Sometimes it is combined with painting. In visual arts, Pablo Picasso is

known for developing this technique in his abstract compositions (“Collage”). In literature, collage is used to designate works that allude to or quote other texts (Baldick, “Collage” 44). The modernist poem *The Waste Land*, by T. S. Eliot, is an example of literary collage. According to Monica Kjellman-Chapin, a collagist transforms random materials into art when he/she endows those resources with new meanings (90). She explains that collage is a “juxtaposition, a pictographic overwriting or painterly overlay” that creates “alternative identities, new narratives, different associations” (90). For her, collage resembles the work of an anthropologist because both the artist and the audience need to excavate the bits and pieces that compose the work in order to create and interpret its meaning.

In Aurora’s collages, the Moor is usually portrayed “in an environment of broken and discarded objects” (*The Moor* 301), which reveals his current low position in society. In *The Death of Chimène*, for instance, a work that marks the transition to the third phase, Sultan Boabdil is not present. Instead, Chimène’s dead body is the central image of the panel. In the second frame of this work, Chimène’s body lies in the middle of “broken effigies and empty bottles and soggy newspapers” (*The Moor* 302). In the panels the Moor appears, he is shown as a creature of shadows, degraded in tableaux of debauchery and crime. He loses, in these last pictures, his previous metaphorical role as a unifier of opposites, a stand-bearer of pluralism, ceasing to stand as a symbol – however approximate – of the new nation, and being transformed, instead, into a semi-allegorical figure of decay. (*The Moor* 303)

The last phase, which illustrates Moraes’ falling from paradise into hell, conveys the evil and the darkness of Moraes’ life as the Hammer, one of Raman Fielding’s henchmen.

In Aurora’s collages, the discarded objects of Bombay become her raw material: rusted iron, cardboard boxes, wood, and pieces of crashed cars. Aurora utilizes those materials not only to compose the scenes, but also to create the characters, who are made “of

what the metropolis did not value: lost buttons, broken windscreen wipers, torn cloth, burned books, exposed camera film” (*The Moor* 302). The unwanted objects stand for the invisible people of the Indian society. Throughout the last phase, the idealized images of hybridity developed in her first paintings give place to the representation of a decaying nation.

Aurora’s final work, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, depicts the expulsion of Boabdil from Granada. This canvas is “a portrait of her son, lost in limbo like a wandering shade: a portrait of a soul in Hell. And behind him, his mother, no longer in a separate panel, but re-united with the tormented Sultan” (*The Moor* 315). The reunion of mother and son indicates Aurora’s willingness to forgive Moraes. Differently from the other works of the last phase, this painting does not have any collages or abstractions. This nostalgic gaze to the first phase of the Moor paintings emphasizes her desire to restore her relationship with Moraes. Nevertheless, Aurora dies before she has the chance to make amends with her son.

Besides being Aurora’s last work, this painting stands out among her works because it conceals in palimpsest the portrait of Aurora’s murderer. Traditionally, a palimpsest effaces what was previously written, or painted, which makes it difficult to see what is underneath.<sup>36</sup> However, in the novel, the use of palimpsests creates layers of signification that do not nullify each other, mainly when they allude to the construction of national identities. As Thiara affirms, “The various layers of the novel’s palimpsest world do not tend to conform to a neat, hierarchical layering but merge into each other or become otherwise indistinguishable” (*Salman* 99). India has accumulated, in palimpsest, years of intercultural contact that contributed to the construction of its national identities. Any attempt to remove a

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<sup>36</sup> Gérard Genette uses *transtextuality* as a general term to define any relationship among texts (1). Transtextuality is divided into five categories: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality. The two most significant categories for the present dissertation are intertextuality and hypertextuality. Whereas intertextuality, a term coined by Julia Kristeva, refers to the use of a previous text in another text, through allusions or direct citations, hypertextuality refers to fictional works that derive from a previous text, without which the second text would not exist (5). The presence of the hypotext in the hypertext permeates the entire work, forming a palimpsest. Nevertheless, as the hypertext transforms the meaning/context of the hypotext, it can be read independently from its hypotext. For further information, see Gérard Genette’s *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*.

layer may compromise the entire fabric, as the novel shows through Raman Fielding, who vindicates India for Hindus, and through Vasco Miranda, who orders the removal of the upper layer of his version of the Moor of Granada. Both Fielding and Vasco fail in their attempts to reestablish a past state that can only manifest itself in the present as memory. Finally, the incompleteness of Aurora's final work emphasizes the need to maintain a space of enunciation where representations of the nation can be continuously elaborated.

The passages about Aurora's works also promote reflections on the metafictional aspects of the novel. Sometimes it is possible to recognize Rushdie's voice commenting on his own work through the descriptions of Aurora's artistic process, the list of some realist Indian writers who inspired Aurora, and the use of intertextual collages. Some examples of collages in the text are the quotes from Charles Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil* (303), William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (114), and a devotional hymn sung by Mahatma Gandhi (*The Moor* 55). Therefore, the metafictional instances are two-fold, inasmuch as they refer to both Aurora and Rushdie's creative processes. Those citations facilitate the construction of meaning in the text and display the intertextual connections that compose the writing of the novel.

*The Moor's Last Sigh* explores Indian heritage by adding a new layer to the binary opposition between the colonials and England. It advances the readers' knowledge on Indian history and reinforces Rushdie's ideas of hybridity, especially through the characters who epitomize the diversity of Indian identities, such as Camoens. The novel also shows how storytelling gives Moraes the means to reflect on his life experience and how writing fulfills his need for closure. Similarly, the metamorphic nature of Aurora's works highlights the hybridity found in Indian history and culture. In her works, West and East are intertwined in such a way that any attempt to separate these elements may compromise the meaning of her

paintings. As an example of Lacan's theory on language, *The Moor's Last Sigh* mirrors a space of enunciation where national identities can be (re-)signified through storytelling.



## 5. Collective Storytelling in *The Enchantress of Florence*

Winner of the Booker Prize, *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), is Salman Rushdie's tenth novel. In this novel, we see the shift from the self-centered narrative of *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* to a collective narrative in the Mughal court during the reign of Akbar the Great. *The Enchantress of Florence* tells Niccolò Vespucci's journey from America to India in order to tell a story to Akbar the Great, the third emperor of the Mughal Empire, who ruled from 1556 to 1605 in the Indian subcontinent. Niccolò aims to reclaim his place as the legitimate son of Qara Köz and, therefore, as Akbar's uncle. When Niccolò finally meets Akbar, he tells the story of Qara Köz's journey from East to West accompanied by the Mirror and Antonino Argalia, a Florentine that has served in the Ottoman army. Not convinced of Niccolò's version of the story, Akbar banishes him from his court. Eventually, Qara Köz reveals that Niccolò is actually the son of the Mirror's daughter.

Niccolò Vespucci uses stories as a means to define himself and to assure his position as a member of the Mughal court.<sup>37</sup> However, the stories of other characters show him that his story is part of a greater one. Niccolò's account alone is not enough to prove his relationship with the emperor. It needs to be validated by other characters. This episode exemplifies Adriana Cavarero's idea that the beginning of one's story is dependable on other people's stories (39). This episode highlights that remembering can be a collective activity because there are some events that need to be reconstituted for us by others (Ricoeur 130). In order to understand Niccolò's construction of his identity through storytelling, I analyze not only his stories, but the role of the characters Hamida Bano, Gulbadan Begum, Dashwanth, Akbar the Great, and Qara Köz. These characters engage in the act of remembering and reconstructing Qara Köz's story. For that purpose, I rely on ideas concerning collective memory to demonstrate that Niccolò's story is dependable of, and affected by, the memories

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<sup>37</sup> Niccolò Vespucci, the son of Ago Vespucci, is named after his father's friend, Niccolò "il Machia."

of the group of which he is part. Moreover, Niccolò's story ends up reviving Qara Köz in the memory of her family and her people. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, the main characters use storytelling as a device to form and rectify collective memory. It also gives them the opportunity to ponder on their own identities as individuals and as members of a community.

The critical works on *The Enchantress of Florence* cover a great range of topics such as the embedded narrative structure, the memory palace technique, and the characterization of the female figures. For the sake of conciseness, in the following paragraphs, I synthesize the main ideas on the dynamics between East and West, the combination of fictional and historical characters, and the boundaries of the imaginary and the real worlds.

East and West constantly encounter each other through the characters who migrate from or to these locations. Some characters are Antonio Argalia, Qara Köz, the Mirror, and Niccolò Vespucci. The diverse historical periods and the comparison between East and West converge into one through the type of storytelling that "transcends cultural, temporal and spatial borders" (Dash 54). Besides, the parallels between Fatehpur Sikri and Florence permeate the entire narrative. As Engelbert Jorissen affirms, the use of doubles in the novel approximates these two cities and emphasizes the common humanity of their population (53).

Rushdie's references to real places and historical figures enhance the reading experience of the narrative. Ursula K. Le Guin asserts that the novel is about stories, both historical and fabulist, and how sometimes it is difficult to differ one from the other. In the same manner, Bruna Rosanò claims that this mixture of fictional and historical characters is similar to a magician's trick; it is a way to "deceive [the] audience" (5), making it difficult to separate reality from fiction. While comparing a storyteller to a magician, Rosanò asserts that the magician uses magic whereas the storyteller uses language (2). In the end, both are able to enchant their audience (Rosanò 2).

Qara K z’s decay from an enchantress to a witch highlights “her foreignness, otherness, strangeness” (Jorissen 57). If we adopt the same criterion to Niccol ’s story, we may affirm that, at the moment when he is found unreliable, his spell fades and his otherness becomes more apparent. Jorissen suggests that Niccol ’s tale represents the Europeans’ dominant narrative that eventually proves to be a lie (70). Thus, in the novel, Indian storytelling becomes more prominent than the European one, inasmuch as Niccol ’s (European) story is eventually substituted by Akbar’s (Indian) version. However, Jorissen fails to notice the unbalanced relations of power between Niccol  and Akbar, the emperor. I continue discussing this issue in the last section of the present chapter.

In “Enchanting Histories of the Empires in Rushdie’s *The Enchantress of Florence*,” K bra Coskun discusses storytelling and the intermingling of fiction and history. Coskun compares historians to storytellers because both create narratives that are subject to interpretations (38). Coskun points out that a historian’s text is also the product of his/her point of view and interests (40). To exemplify that, Coskun mentions Babar’s decision to erase K z’s story from the Mughal history books. For Coskun, writers assume the role of a historian when they use historical events and characters in their novels. Rushdie, for instance, mixes history and fiction in a manner that readers cannot tell which elements are fictional or historical (Coskun 39-40). In an interview with Robert Siegel, Rushdie has commented that people would be impressed to know that a great portion of the characters and events that seem to be fictional are actually taken from history (Rushdie, “Rushdie’s Latest Novel”).

In *The Enchantress of Florence*, Rushdie organizes the stories in embedded narratives. Despite having only one omniscient narrator, the main plot divides into other stories. Ursula Kluwick argues that “realism is constantly challenged by the many instances of mise en abyme that surface between the various diegetic levels of the novel” (56). The self-conscious aspect of the novel is a constant reminder of its fictionality. For Nicole Thiara,

the narrative structure of the novel allows each minor story to fully take place before returning to the main plot (“Enabling Spaces” 421). The narrative flows in such an organized fashion that it facilitates the reading of the novel.

Kluwick claims that the fantastical aspects of the novel do not shadow its realist tone: “although the realist code is considerably weaker than in other novels, *The Enchantress of Florence* contains enough recognisable information in order to prevent it from being classified as pure fabulation” (58). Kluwick highlights that imagination, through visual arts and words, is constantly interfering with the reality in the novel. Dashwanth’s portrait of Akbar’s imaginary wife and Niccolò Vespucci’s version of Queen Elizabeth I’s letter are examples of the effects of imagination in the reality of the characters. Jodhabai, Akbar’s imaginary wife, becomes real to the court after Dashwanth paints her portrait. She moves from Akbar’s mind to everyone else’s imagination (Kluwick 56). Niccolò, on the other hand, reimagines the content of the letter in order to please the emperor (Kluwick 57). In both cases, creativity and imagination affect the reality inside the novel. Furthermore, there are enough extra-textual references, such as real cities and historical figures, to support the realist tone of the novel and its verisimilitude in relation to the world outside the novel (Kluwick 58).

As for the dynamics of East and West, Thiara asserts that Fatehpur Sikri stands as a safe place for Akbar’s experiments with hybridity. She claims that “Akbar’s story is the unifying structure of the hybrid tale and Fatehpur Sikri becomes the site from where the Persian, Ottoman, and Florentine tales are judged” (“Enabling Spaces” 421). In Sikri, the emperor can “learn lessons in hybridity from foreigners, his enemies, his female relatives, and his imaginary lovers, by allowing himself to be curious about other ways of living” (“Enabling Spaces” 422). Thiara also points out that the hybridity of the Mughal Empire is a political strategy. In this novel, as in previous works, Rushdie suggests that hybridity can

cause inequalities when it is manipulated by one of the parties: “rather than uncritically celebrating hybridity, Rushdie is also always interested in showing the dangers and pitfalls in cultural intermingling, since an unequal distribution of power can lead to one party dictating the terms of encounter” (“Enabling Spaces” 418). Hybridity in *The Enchantress of Florence* is a controlled experiment, whereas it is a fluid phenomenon in Bombay in *Midnight’s Children* and in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (“Enabling Spaces” 416). Finally, Thiara attributes Akbar’s failure in establishing a hybrid society to his inability to accept Niccolò Vespucci in his court permanently (“Hybridity” 63).

William Deresiewicz argues that commerce, the city, and family form with storytelling the main subjects of the novel. Deresiewicz explains that the open market is a place where people can hear and tell stories: “storytelling is a kind of trade, an exchange of goods for the satisfaction of appetites, a busy engagement with the world; and stories, like markets, are public places, places for ‘meetings, purchases, and pleasure.’” Similarly, the city stands as a “place of variety, mystery, fortuity, possibility, conflict - all the elements that most make for good stories.” Finally, the family is “the place where storytelling begins.” One hears the first tales through the storytelling of a parent, a grandparent, or a close relative. For Deresiewicz, storytelling is closely related to childhood because it is the period of life when it is easier to believe in stories.

Despite the great array of themes discussed in the aforementioned critical works, there is still room for an analysis of the novel that considers the characters’ reconstruction of the enchantress’ story through the foundations of collective memory. Thus, in this chapter, I offer an overview on collective memory and discuss how it intersects with, and differs from, personal and historical memories before turning to the analysis of the novel based on the effects of collective remembering in the stories of individual characters and in the history of the Mughal Empire. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, personal and collective identities are

forged, negotiated or rectified by the act of collective storytelling. In the last section of this chapter, I analyze Akbar's representation as the synthetization of his people and his role as the arbiter of Niccolò's story.

### From Personal to Collective Memory

As the previous chapter shows, personal identity is closely related to memory. The whole idea of the self relies on the ability to remember past stories over time. However, an individual's memory is not composed solely of his/her personal memories. Part of what one knows about oneself and the world is dependable on external factors, on cultural artifacts, on history, and finally, on other people's stories. Being part of a social group, people share not only habits, languages, and spaces, but also memories of a common past. That is what constitutes a nation and what constitutes sub-groups within it. Therefore, collective memory is a constituent element in the formation of the identity of an individual. The memory generated in groups frames one's personal memory (Whitehead 126). The groups one belongs to partially determine how one sees the world and how one sees oneself.

According to Maurice Halbwachs, memory is inherently collective because we never remember alone (23). Our memory is always grounded on our interactions with other people and their remarks about the world around us influence our remembrances (24). Comments and suggestions from friends, a documentary, a book, an article in a magazine, or even a map can alter our memory of a particular place or event and, consequently, change our experience. When our remembrances of an event are not accurate, we need others to "rectify and re-establish" them for us (25). For personal memories to be rectified by collective memory, the remembrances of a group have to seem plausible to the individual so that they are incorporated into his/her memory (Halbwachs 31). If s/he does not recognize any part of the remembrance, the group's memory cannot reconstruct it altogether for her/him. Halbwachs

also asserts that keeping contact with the group is primordial to the maintenance of our remembrances because a detached member may forget the shared experience over time (Halbwachs 30).

Although there is no hierarchy between personal and collective memory, Halbwachs explain that personal memory is centered on a person's own interest and personality, whereas collective memory seeks a common interest within the group. Sometimes these kinds of memory overlap each other. Halbwachs asserts that "the individual memory, in order to corroborate and make precise and even to cover the gaps in its remembrances, relies upon, relocates itself within, momentarily merges with, the collective memory" (50-51). Because people often store remembrances that are not their own, but other people's or even the nation's, Halbwachs classifies memory into autobiographical and historical memory. Whereas autobiographical memory is internal and centered on the life of an individual, historical memory covers a longer period in time (52).

He also differs collective memory from historical memory. Collective memory "retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive" (Halbwachs 80). It focuses on the present and on smaller communities. In contrast, historical memory refers to a distant period of time and to a larger group. The events in history books are usually written down when society starts to forget them or when their effects on society have decreased (78). Besides, history is an artificial kind of memory because the events are usually compiled and organized by a historian, rather than the people that have experienced them.

William Hirst and David Manier highlight that collective memory is not the same as shared information (184). Neither is it individual memory shared within a group (Coman et al. 126). In fact, collective memories are remembrances that influence the identity of a community and give its member a sense of belonging together. Collective memory usually

occurs as communicative or cultural memories. The first type consists of everyday memory transmitted from a person to another through conversations. The second type is related to objectified culture: artifacts, celebrations, and texts, for example. Cultural memory is divided into two categories: potential and actual. A potential cultural memory is an archive in a museum, for instance, and the actual cultural memory occurs when a person rescues some remembrances from that archive, making them part of their community (Hirst and Manier 186). As shown above, collective memory can be located both inside the memory of a community and in the world (Hirst and Manier 187). However, it just actively molds the identity of a group when people go through the process of remembering.

For Alin Coman and colleagues, conversation is one of the most natural means of transmitting memory (130). When a group remembers together, it transforms “relatively individuated memories” into a coherent story (Coman et al. 133). These “conversational interactions can multiply in complex ways and may, after numerous conversations, lead to a convergence onto a shared community-help rendering” (Coman et al. 131). In this manner, collective memory can reach a group as large as a nation. Conversations can also provide counter-memories that offer alternative versions of a historical event. As Michel Foucault has argued, in its search for the so-called truth, history has succumbed to neutrality (162). History may sometimes detach historical events from their sources. In other words, the people who have experienced them or are related to them are minimally considered in this kind of discourse (Foucault 164). As opposed to history, collective narratives allow individuals to actively participate in the construction of their identities as a group. These counter-stories resignify the meaning of key concepts and events for the community and “provide the framework through which individual stories gain wider meaning” (Eyerman, “The Past” 27).

In order to be maintained, collective memory depends on transmission and stability. The process of transmission allows the members of the community to share or renew their



memories as a group and as individuals. Collective memory can occur when a person shares his/her memories with a group (through conversation or any kind of cultural artifact), but it can also happen without any transmission (when people experience the event together) (Hirst and Manier 192). However, a set of memories only becomes collective when they acquire stability. But, even when it happens, it does not imply that it will not be reshaped over time. Like a personal remembrance, collective memory goes through processes of revision and rectification.

Because collective identity is related to the remembrance of a common past, it includes experiences that are part of the collective memory of a people. Halbwachs states that national events are usually distant from an individual and, therefore, it is not part of his/her collective memory. He affirms that national history is just a framework for an individual's history. To prove his statement, he remembers that "[i]n many novels tracing the destiny of an individual or a family, knowledge of the period during which the action occurs is quite unimportant, and their psychological content would not be lost if the story were set in another period" (Halbwachs 77). Rushdie's novels are clearly an exception to this rule. They rather abide by Benedict Anderson's idea that comprehends a nation as an imagined community.

Differently from Halbwachs, Ron Eyerman affirms that collective memory is a constituent factor in "the identity-formation of a people" ("Cultural Trauma" 1). Eyerman's research focuses on the collective memory derived from a traumatic event. He explains that "cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" ("Cultural Trauma" 2). The notion of cultural trauma implies that direct experience of an event is not a necessary condition for its inclusion in the trauma process. In other words, a person does not need to experience a trauma to feel its impacts on his/her life. Events, such as slavery and colonialism, can be traumatic in retrospect (Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma" 1).

Therefore, memory can also be a collective inheritance, since one's identity and memory are "always rooted in a collective history" (Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma" 5-6). Collective memory unites a group spatially and chronologically: "Within the narrative provided by this collective memory individual identities are shaped as experiential frameworks formed out of, as they are embedded within, narratives of past, present and future" (Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma" 6). Memory can be modified throughout years. It is through time-delayed and negotiated recollection that cultural trauma is experienced (Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma" 12). Therefore, younger generations may be affected by collective memory in distinct ways than the generations that experience the traumatic experience.

Connecting past and present, a trauma can cause a distorted view of the self or of the community in question (Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma" 3). Within a group, a person can "renegotiate the emotional significance of a shared past experience, to arrive at both a more accurate picture of the past and a more fruitful conception of current self and other" (Barnier and Sutton 179). Friends, family, and other trusted people can help an individual put together the fragments of one's past. Although one's memory can also be badly influenced by others, reflecting on one's remembrances with a group usually has positive effects.

In the following section, I discuss the dynamics of collective memory in the novel and how it has changed the lives of the characters involved in the process of collective remembering. Niccolò Vespucci starts a story about his origins, but it ends up revealing a hidden episode of the Mughal history. Whereas the history books only contain what favors the emperors, the characters' personal memories are filled with knowledge that contradicts the official narrative. Through collective storytelling, the characters reconstruct the history of the Empire and ponder on their own identities.

Collective Memory and Storytelling in *The Enchantress of Florence*

Rushdie's novels are usually filled with minor stories that flow along with the main plot. However, in *The Enchantress of Florence*, the stories are told by different characters. In a collective storytelling act, the main storytellers revive their memories of the enchantress and, consequently, reinsert her into history. As the story about the enchantress is spread around the city, she becomes part of its collective memory. People who have never heard of the princess start to dream about her. This collective storytelling also temporarily unites Niccolò Vespucci to the Mughal court.

The main storyteller in the novel is Niccolò Vespucci: "Himself a teller of tales, he had been driven out of his door by stories of wonder, and by one in particular, a story which could make his fortune or else cost him his life" (*Enchantress* 11). Niccolò is an expert on the art of storytelling. As a genuine storyteller, Niccolò shows the potency of stories to generate "amusement, interest, disappointment, disillusion, surprise, amazement, fascination, irritation, pleasure, perplexity, suspicion, affection, boredom, . . . fondness and admiration" (*Enchantress* 340). Wherever he goes, he enchants people with his stories, both fictional and supposedly real ones. Niccolò is "confident of his powers of charm, persuasion, and enchantment" (*Enchantress* 15). These are useful characteristics for a storyteller, but also for a trickster. He uses stories all the way to Fatehpur Sikri. He assumes different personas and uses different languages to support the fictional characters that he creates in order to conceal his true identity.<sup>38</sup> His future depends on his success as a storyteller because Niccolò has a specific audience in mind: the emperor of the Mughal Empire, Akbar the Great.

Telling his story is crucial for Niccolò because it can change his life. While in the dungeons of the palace, he ponders on the importance of storytelling: "All men needed to hear their stories told. He was a man, but if he died without telling the story he would be

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<sup>38</sup> See chapter six for the analysis of Niccolò Vespucci's invented selves.

something less than that . . . The dungeon did not understand the idea of story. The dungeon was static, eternal, black, and a story needed motion and time and light” (*Enchantress* 95). Story is synonymous with life. It defines him as a man. Moraes, in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, also starts to lose his sense of identity during his imprisonment. Solitude and despair make these characters start to forget their stories. Losing one’s story is equivalent to losing one’s identity. Niccolò is eventually saved by his insistence on holding on to his stories.

The first stories told by Niccolò decrease his reliability as a narrator because many elements of those stories are false. For this reason, Akbar and, consequently, the readers question Niccolò’s narrative throughout the novel. This attitude is understandable because Niccolò alters some elements of his previous tales. However, in what regards the story of his life, he stands as both the teller and the audience, for he is completely unaware of the truth about his origin. Niccolò becomes an example of the necessity of questioning meta-narratives. His greatest flaw is his blind belief in the stories he has been told. In fact, Niccolò never knows the truth about his heritage. His mother also dies unaware of the fictionality of her own story. When Qara Köz tells Akbar the true version, it is too late for any rectifications.

Niccolò Vespucci’s storytelling performance to the emperor starts like a folktale: “In the beginning there were three friends” (*Enchantress* 142). This opening line evinces memorization and sets a mythical tone to his narrative. He does not seem to improvise when he tells his story. Niccolò is actually retelling the tale as he has heard from his parents. According to Adriana Cavarero, one needs to trust in other people to tell the story of the beginning of one’s life: “Autobiographical memory always recounts a story that is incomplete from the beginning. It is necessary to go back to the narration told by others, in order for the story to begin from where it really began; and it is this first chapter of the story that the narratable self stubbornly seeks with all of her desire” (39). Niccolò wants to be

acknowledged as the son of the great enchantress of Florence because this recognition will fulfill his desire for greatness. A similar desire moves Saleem's in *Midnight's Children*. Indeed, both characters recognize the importance of their stories. Niccolò's preference for the fictional name Mogor dell'Amore reinforces his desire to be connected to the Mughal Empire.

Hamida Bano, the emperor's mother, and Gulbadan Begum, his aunt, are the ones that first validate Niccolò's remembrances of Qara Köz. Although these women do not have any political role, they are the oldest relatives alive. Being the keepers of the stories, they are the ones that verify and confirm part of the story told by Niccolò. They know the genealogy of the kings and the hidden chapter of the Mughal Empire. After Qara Köz's decision not to come back to her homeland, her brother, Babar the Beaver, erases her name from the history books and from the mouth of his subjects. The stories of the princess survive in the mind of the people who know her, such as her sister Khanzada Begum. And even though the rumors could not be confirmed, they secretly passed through generations.

What happens in this episode is an imposed form of selection, one that omits Qara Köz from the Mughal history and forces the whole empire to forget the princess. According to Paul Ricœur, the fragility of memory, here in the form of "a concerted manipulation of memory and of forgetting by those who hold power," can evince a fragility of identity (80). Ricœur affirms that the fragility of identity may be caused by "the confrontation with others, felt to be a threat" to one's own identity (81). He explains that "our identity [can become] so fragile that we are unable to bear, unable to endure the fact that others have different ways than our own of leading their lives, of understating themselves" (81). Therefore, Babar's rejecting Köz may be a symptom of his inability to accept her refusal to return to her homeland. Babar's intolerance is aggravated because of his high position in society, which allows him to erase Köz from the historical records.

This forced omission is eventually rectified by the act of collective remembering. Collective memory, Halbwachs observes, is composed of individual's memories. Each person contributes to a part of the story that together forms the whole (Halbwachs 32). In the novel, individual memories are used as parameters to judge other people's remembrances. Without Gulbadan Begum's participation, Niccolò would not be able to prove Qara Köz has ever existed because her story has been erased from the historical records. Gulbadan is also the one who remembers the enchantress' real name.

The past may be fragmented when it is composed solely of an individual's memory. In Niccolò's case, his memory needed to be shared within a group and then negotiated by its members so that they could compose a more complete remembrance of the past. The old ladies' memories change Niccolò's status from a liar to a person the emperor may trust. However, the ladies do not know the complete story either. The construction of the story culminates in Qara Köz's own testimony in the end of the novel.

Niccolò's story fills up a gap in the history of the Mughal Empire in India, inasmuch as he is the one who explains to Akbar that the princess is partially the reason why Babar has to move to the East (*Enchantress* 235). If Niccolò had not appeared in the Mughal court, the story of the black-eyed princess would probably die with the two ladies (*Enchantress* 119). Nevertheless, to be considered a cultural artifact, Niccolò's tale needs to be confronted by history, here represented by Gulbadan Begum, and approved by the emperor, who is the judge of all stories. None of the individual stories alone are sufficient to tell the life of Köz. The negotiation of those partial memories results in the reconstruction of her story and in its re-establishment in the memory of the Mughal people.

The collective remembering of the princess' story counts with the artistic imagination of Dashwanth, a painter who becomes a visual storyteller: "it was Dashwanth whom Akbar summoned when he had his idea about undoing his grandfather's harsh deed and restoring the

hidden princess to the history of her family at last” (*Enchantress* 126). Dashwanth “paint[s] her into the world” (126), reimagining her life from childhood to adulthood. Actually, it is only after seeing the hidden princess on canvas that Gulbadan remembers her name.

Dashwanth eventually falls in love with the enchantress and turns “himself into an imaginary being” by entering one of the canvases (*Enchantress* 135). He is one example of how the retelling of her story affects the people in Sikri.

The story of the hidden princess does not remain within the walls of the palace. It spreads among the inhabitants of Sikri. Qara appears in their dreams assuming the image of “a paragon of Muslim devotion and conservative behavior” to Hamida Bano and of “a free-spirited adventuress” to Gulbadan (*Enchantress* 216), to name a few examples. The enchantress becomes “all things to all people, an exemplar, a lover, an antagonist, a muse” (*Enchantress* 216). She embodies the villagers’ “preferences, abhorrences, prejudices, idiosyncrasies, secrets, misgivings, and joys, their unrealized selves, their shadows, their innocence and guilt, their doubts and certainties, their most generous and also most grudging response to their passage through the world” (*Enchantress* 216-17). She becomes a cultural symbol for the people in Sikri. She represents the possibility of accomplishing their aspirations and the confirmation of their beliefs. This is the way her story popularizes among the citizens of Sikri and how she metaphorically returns to her homeland.

As Qara Kōz’s story becomes known around the city, Khanzada Begum’s reputation deteriorates. She is now seen as “the archetype of all cruel sisters, and her name, once so much revered, became an insult women flung at each other in anger when they wanted to make accusations of vanity, jealousy, pettiness, or betrayal” (*Enchantress* 221). The situation becomes a public issue when all women in Sikri are infected by a feeling of “discord [that] floated up out of the tale” (*Enchantress* 221). The story of the enchantress moves from the imaginary realm to the streets of Sikri and generates a range of reactions, such as inner

reflections and interpersonal conflicts. Storytelling in the novel generates both good and bad results. In the aftermath of this conflict, Princess Gulbadan catches a cold that leads to her death. Before dying, she reminds Akbar that Khazanda Begum should always be remembered as his loving great-aunt, for she is not the monster the city has portrayed her to be.

### Akbar the Great: The Audience as the Arbiter of Stories

In the two previous chapters of the dissertation, we see how storytelling allows the narrators to make sense of their life journey and understand their identities as hybrid subjects. Differently from Saleem and Moraes, who reach a sense of fulfillment after telling their stories, Niccolò Vespucci does not gain any self-knowledge or any other kind of benefit from his story. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, it is the audience who goes through a process of self-reflection. Another difference lies on the audience's participation in the construction of the narrative. Although Saleem and Moraes also have an audience, their listeners did not nullify their stories. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, the audience judges the veracity of the narrator's tale and becomes part of the creative process. Storytelling, in this novel, is central in the construction of the listeners' identity, especially Akbar's, who is the ultimate arbiter of Niccolò's story.

According to Thiara, Akbar is the center of the story, the judge of other people's story, and the mind behind the hybridity of his people ("Enabling Spaces" 419). He becomes a cautionary example of the problems concerning controlled hybrid arrangements. Akbar is closely related to the place in which he lives. His sense of belonging to the land is so powerful that the city becomes an extension of Akbar's identity; it is "the mirror of his mood, character and world view" (Thiara, "Enabling Spaces" 419). Akbar and his city are the Indian representatives of cultural hybridity (Thiara, "Enabling Spaces" 419-20). Indeed, his role as



the king of the Mughal court entails many responsibilities and a great sense of identification with his people.

Despite the tautology of his name, Akbar does not feel as the great one.<sup>39</sup> He worries about becoming a better version of his self. As the narrator tells us: “The king was not content with being. He was striving to become” (*Enchantress* 39). Abandoned by his father when he was fourteen months old, Akbar was raised by his aunt. He lived his childhood in exile. He knows that he is “a self born not in victory but in defeat” (*Enchantress* 40). Despite his difficult childhood, Akbar grows up to be great and victorious. His childhood explains a lot about his willingness to accept hybridity because he himself is a hybrid person. He has absorbed so much of the locals’ culture that he considers to be an integral part of the land. His childhood experiences also explain Akbar’s urge to control and to know everything in advance.

Through Akbar, Rushdie extends the idea of oneself as a nation that he began in *Midnight’s Children*. Saleem is a “swallower of lives,” Akbar is “a swallower of worlds.” Rushdie even repeats the expression “many-headed monster,” used in *Midnight’s Children* to refer to India, as a way to define Akbar himself (*Enchantress* 33). Saleem sees himself as the representative of the Indian people, but Akbar embodies the nation on a deeper level, mainly because he sees himself as the summary of the distinct peoples that compose his kingdom, their history, and their cultural traits. Akbar sees himself as the nation, not only in relation to the population, but also with regard to everything that composes his kingdom:

When he said ‘we,’ he naturally and truly meant himself as an incarnation of all his subjects, of all his cities and lands and rivers and mountains and lakes, as well as all the animals and plants and trees within his frontiers, . . . he meant himself as the sum

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<sup>39</sup> Born Abul-Fath Jalaluddin Muhammad, the emperor is known, since his childhood, as Akbar, which means “the great” (*Enchantress* 32). Eventually, he becomes known “as Akbar the Great, the great great one, great in his greatness, doubly great, so great that the repetition in his title was not only appropriate but necessary in order to express the gloriousness of his glory” (*Enchantress* 33).

total of all his victories, himself as containing the characters, the abilities, the histories, perhaps even the souls of his decapitated or merely pacified opponents; and, in addition, he meant himself as the apogee of his people's past and present, and the engine of their future. (*Enchantress* 33-34)

The use of the pronoun "we" to refer to himself reinforces the idea of embodiment of the nation.<sup>40</sup> His identification with his people is so great that he does not feel Mongol, but Hindustani (*Enchantress* 36-37). In fact, the line of kings that comes before him stands as a burden to him because of the excessive use of violence in their quest for power. The use of the plural pronoun highlights his role as the representative of his city and of his subjects, but it leaves little space for his own personal self.

Akbar is unsure why he cannot refer to himself in the first person. He sees himself as plural, but he also recognizes that all his subjects are equally plural due to their multiple roles in their families and communities. Nevertheless, his political position prevents him from thinking about himself as an individual. Even though he considers the pronoun "I" more personal, he rarely uses it in public. There are only two instances when he does so. The first time occurs in a private moment with his wife Jodha, who unable to perceive the difference, ignores it completely. The second instance happens when his friend Birbal passes away. In his grief, Akbar writes a verse using the first person singular: "He wrote for the first and last time in the first person, not as a king would, but as a man singing a lament for his beloved" (*Enchantress* 344). The rare use of the pronoun "I" highlights the emperor's uneasiness to reveal his inner self and reinforces his representation as the embodiment of the Mughal Empire.

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<sup>40</sup> The use of the pronoun "we" by a king or queen instead of the singular pronoun "I" is known as the majestic plural or the royal we. It is a common practice among monarchs, popes, or political authorities. The majestic plural can also invoke an authority figure's kingdom, administration or subordinates.

It is through Akbar that the novel raises issues concerning the relation of the self with the collective: “*What did it mean to be a man so completely among men, and women too? When solitude was banished, did one become more oneself, or less? Did the crowd enhance one’s selfhood or erase it?*” (*Enchantress* 151). Akbar gets impressed by the way the Florentines enjoyed their lives in public. Although Florence also fails to maintain a hybrid community, the relationship among its inhabitants is not controlled by an authoritarian entity. Different from Florence, life in Sikri is discrete and excessively organized. In fact, Sikri becomes a synonym of the plurality of the Mughal Empire under Akbar’s governance.

Akbar is portrayed as an enchanter, the conjurer of things through words, the king who has created a wife out of his will and imagination. In Sikri, “[H]e would conjure a new world, a world beyond religion, region, rank, and tribe” (*Enchantress* 45). That statement summarizes Akbar’s idea of hybridity and points out one of the themes of the novel: the art of bringing things/people into existence by the power of imagination. His creating a wife out of his imagination proves his powers of enchantment.

The construction of the city that “look[s] like a mirage” (*Enchantress* 29) takes twelve years to be completed, right in time for Akbar’s fortieth birthday. The splendor of Akbar’s red palace does not coincide with the center of the city that is “built of wood and mud and dung and brick as well as stone, huddled beneath the walls of the mighty red stone plinth upon which the royal residences stood” (*Enchantress* 30-31). In the city, the neighborhoods are divided by race (the Hindus, the Persians, the Turanis, and the Indian born Muslims) and by trade (nobles, artists, musicians, dancers) (*Enchantress* 31). The division implies that the peoples that lived in Fatehpur Sikri could still maintain some of their cultural traits and live together with their peers or compatriots. Although Fatehpur Sikri embraces people from multiple backgrounds, it fails to blend the people into a nation. In this sense, Sikri resembles Benengeli in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. Both cities host an artificial kind of hybridity because

they welcome people from other countries, but they are unable to create and maintain a connection among them.

Akbar's desire to create "a joint global empire that unite[s] the eastern and western hemispheres" is epitomized in his city and in the Tent of the New Worship, a place where everything can be said (*Enchantress* 79). It is the culmination of Akbar's idea of multiculturalism and hybridity. One day, Akbar invites Niccolò Vespucci to the Tent in order to show his new invention. However, he has not expected that Niccolò would mock him in front of his friends. Akbar seems to disregard that cultural encounters are not always amicable; they can also cause antagonism: "they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress" (Bhabha, *The Location* 3). Akbar fails in his attempt to create a space where hybridity can really exist because he is unable to accept any encounters that he cannot control. Eventually, Akbar's rage passes and he forgives Niccolò's indiscretion. This episode demonstrates that Akbar is not prepared for a fluid kind of hybridity, inasmuch as he is not used to people confronting him. In the end, the idea of the Tent works better in his mind than in practice.

When deciding whether or not to accept Niccolò in his court, Akbar thinks about the image he would portray of himself as an emperor and the implications of this Western-Eastern bond: "he could incorporate into his line – into himself – persons, places, narratives, possibilities from lands as yet unknown, lands which might, in their turn, also be subsumed" (*Enchantress* 346). For him, the syncretization of the world under his government would start with Niccolò. Nevertheless, his intentions fail when he is unable to accept Niccolò as his honorary son. In Akbar's own version of Qara Kōz's story, Niccolò is actually her grandson, the offspring of an incestuous liaison. Assuming that his version is accurate, Akbar cuts any relations with the foreigner. He shifts from the role of audience to that of a narrator, changing

the outcome of the story. This episode exemplifies the fluidity of oral storytelling that allows listeners to become part of the creative process by making changes in the narrative.

The impasse between Akbar's and Niccolò's versions highlights the difference between their status as narrators. Stories told by an authority figure tend to be more prominent than the ones told by minorities or subalterns. Francesca Polletta and colleagues have observed that the effect of stories depends on the storyteller's position in society: "storytelling, like other discursive forms, was embedded in hierarchies of cultural authority that shaped the credibility of particular stories" (114). Neither Niccolò nor Akbar can prove the veracity of their stories, but, because of his political position, Akbar's version prevails over Niccolò's. Once the emperor is convinced that Niccolò's version is inaccurate, Akbar bans Niccolò from his court.

The enchantress's story is collectively told by Niccolò, the royal women, the painter Dashwanth, and the emperor himself. Eventually, Qara Köz tells Akbar the truth about her life in America and about Niccolò's parental origin. She reveals that he is in fact the son of the Mirror's daughter with her own father. Neither Niccolò's nor Akbar's stories are accurate. In the end of the story, Akbar allows himself to love and to be loved by his great-aunt. He despises Niccolò for being the fruit of an incest, but he does not consider a crime to have a relationship with Qara Köz. Once again, the difference between Niccolò and Akbar lies on their political position.

Taking another step back in the Indian history, *The Enchantress of Florence* reveals another layer of the hybrid identity of Rushdie's characters, and, consequently, of the Indian population. In the novel, Rushdie explores storytelling as a collective practice that changes individual lives and the history of an empire. The novel brings forward the benefits of such practices, but it does not fail to show that stories are also subject to hierarchies.

## 6. The Invented Self

All the world's a stage,  
 And all the men and women merely players;  
 They have their exits and their entrances;  
 And one man in his time plays many parts,  
 Shakespeare (*As You Like It* 2.7.139-142)

According to the epigraph above, each person plays many parts throughout the course of his/her life. These parts refer to the phases varying from childhood to adulthood and, eventually, death. A person, besides growing up and getting old, actually plays many roles and adopts different personas.<sup>41</sup> In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, when Moraes wants to adjust to society, for instance, he is actually playing the role of what he thinks others expect from him. Likewise, Uma and Abraham create versions of themselves to portray to the world. However, these two characters rely on storytelling much earlier in their lives than Moraes, who only tells the story of his life when he is forced to do so. Uma's and Abraham's autobiographical stories sustain their fictional selves.

All autobiographical accounts are, to varying degrees, fictionalized versions of reality, but they may have different levels of fictionalization. As Laura Marcus puts it, “[W]orks of autobiography lay claims to truth which are different from the constructed realities of fiction” (24). Autobiographies also call readers’ attention to “the complexities of truth” that may “include the work of memory and the gaps produced by forgetting; the distinction between experience revived (as if, for example, from the child’s point of view) and recalled (from the perspectives of an adult narrator); the conception of the self from the ‘inside’ and from the

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<sup>41</sup> The word person, which comes from Latin, means “*persona* actor’s mask, character in a play” (“Person”). This definition hints at the fictional aspect, or the potency of the fictionalization, of the self.

‘outside’, as reflected back to us by others” (Marcus 24). The self that is exposed in autobiographical stories is just one of its several versions. In *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, for instance, the reader can see that Moraes’ self-portrayal in his own narrative differs from Aurora’s portrayal of Moraes’ life in her paintings.

In the present chapter, I take the idea of the invented self that Moraes uses to define Vasco Miranda to analyze the characters who assume, at least, a different persona throughout their lives. They are Vasco Miranda, Abraham Zogoiby, Uma Sarasvati, Niccolò Vespucci, Amina Sinai, Jodha, and the Mirror. The first four characters forge fictional identities to display to the world. Their personas are usually intended to hide a secret part of their lives. In contrast, Amina, Jodha, and the Mirror have their identities created by others. The invented self is, thus, an intentionally fictionalized fragment of these characters’ identities. The self-inventors rely on storytelling to construct and maintain their identity since an early stage in their lives. Moraes and Saleem, in contrast, do not tell their stories throughout their lives. They rather start to write their narratives in a late stage of their lives as if their texts were a conclusion of their journey.

According to Jacques Lacan, one’s identity is formed in two major stages: first, in the imaginary, second, in the symbolic orders. The imaginary order, or the order of images, consists of the formation of one’s self-awareness that starts through the recognition of one’s body in the mirror stage (“The Mirror” 1). Through this process, one learns to distinguish oneself from the image in the mirror, which is an external version of oneself. This image gives an infant a sense of his/her body as a whole, which otherwise is perceived in fragments (“The Mirror” 3). The desire for, and the illusion of, completion comes from this moment of self-identification. In the imaginary order, an infant also starts to differentiate his/her body from others’.

When a child learns to speak, s/he enters the symbolic order, the order of language and verbal representations, in which the images of the imaginary order are substituted for symbols (the signifiers). In the symbolic order, a child understands that s/he and her/his mother are not the same person, advancing the differentiation process initiated in the imaginary order (Tyson 28). S/he also learns that s/he is not the locus of her/his mother's desire. Thus, the symbolic order marks the loss of this connection to the mother. As Lois Tyson explains, throughout one's life, one unconsciously tries to find a substitute for this lost object of desire, but this loss cannot be recovered (28).

During this process of one's alienation in language, that is, when one realizes that one is not the object of the other's desire, the subject is constituted through his/her interactions with others: "the subject is caught up in the chain of signification and it is the signifier that marks the subject, that defines the subject's position within the symbolic order" (Homer 45). In the symbolic order, one is able to externalize one's desires and to recognize others' desires as well: "It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence by the co-operation of others" ("The Mirror" 4). As social interactions are connected to the symbolic order, the representation of one's identity is always dependent on others.

Constituted within the limits of language, identities are, Stuart Hall states, "the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a 'lack,' across a division, from the place of the Other" (6). Identities are also subject to the constraints of one's position in the world and the ideologies of the society in which one lives. Tyson explains, "[T]he Symbolic Order consists of society's ideologies: its beliefs, values, and biases; its system of government, laws, educational practices, religious tenets, and the like" (31). Similarly, Stuart Hall highlights that "discourse itself is a regulative



and regulated formation” that determines how identities are produced in accordance with the ideologies of the times or as a resistance to them (11). In the selected novels, we see how the self-inventors articulate their fictional identities in order to abide by or resist what others, be they their closest ones or society as a whole, expect from them.

In Lacan’s theory, the subject is not a unified or fixed being. Neither does it reach completion. As Lacan puts it, the subject “introduces division into the individual, as well as into the collectivity that is his equivalent” (“The Function” 60). The subject is constantly going through a process of resignification. Thus, the subject is not constructed in the past tense, it rather corresponds to “the future anterior” of a person, pointing simultaneously at a future state and the surpassing of this state (“The Function” 64). When one uses language to express oneself, one is not exposing an already-formed self, but evoking oneself through language.

Stuart Hall affirms that identities are fragmented and multiple, inasmuch as they are produced in different social positions, political contexts, and historical frames. He also states that identities “arise from the narrativization of the self” (4). Autobiographical storytelling is, thus, an instance of self-identification analogous to the mirror stage (L. Anderson 65), but it also epitomizes the process of self-representation through narratives. In the case of the invented self, the image one projects to the world is not only an idealized version of the self, but also a fictional one. Thus, the self-inventors’ stories belong in the intersection of both imaginary and symbolic orders, inasmuch as they are, on different levels, inventions of the mind, created within the limits of language. The fictional aspect of this construction, Stuart Hall affirms, does not interfere in “its discursive, material or political effectivity” (4). In the novels, the self-inventors create fictional versions of themselves in order to direct other characters’ attention to certain aspects of their lives, avoiding other factors that compromise their self-representations and that may badly influence other characters’ opinion about them.

Any autobiographer resorts to fiction in his/her storytelling but in the case of the self-inventors, fictionalization permeates their stories from beginning to end. Moreover, the narrators of the novels constantly contrast the self-inventors' versions of themselves to their supposedly true stories, allowing readers to perceive that the self-inventors' actions do not concur with the stories they are telling the other characters. Rom Harré's division of the concept of person can help us understand the difference between the stories told by the self-inventors and the versions showed by the narrators. Harré explains that each person is composed of three selves that represent the basic roles that s/he plays in life. Rooted in the material world, the first self is related to the body and the notions of time and space (61). The second self is related to a person's self-reflection, beliefs, and knowledge (61). The third self comprehends social aspects and how the self is portrayed to others (61). How one shows oneself to others may vary from situation to situation. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, for example, Moraes reveals these three functions of the self: first, in his problematic relation to his fast-ageing body, second, in his portrayal of the Indian society, mainly in the moments when he transits in different social contexts, and, finally, when he tries to posit himself as being the man he appears to be, instead of assuming the indeterminacy of his personal identity. As Harré points out, "Each person has a repertoire of autobiographies appropriate for different cultural settings, and most people are skilled at constructing new autobiographies for novel occasions. This opens up the disparity between what one believes about oneself (self-concept) and what is true about oneself" (62). Although adapting to new contexts is a common part of living in society, sometimes a person may intentionally control his/her self-representation in order to benefit from the situation.

Charles Taylor defines identity as the combination of frameworks that guides people's life giving them a sense of who they are. He affirms, "My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try

to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose” (27). This framework, also called orientation, allows people to know who they are, based on what is important to them (30). A person’s religion, nationality, and political affiliations are some examples of the frameworks that guide her/his life and provide orientations that help s/he answer the question Who am I? For Taylor, a person’s frameworks are accumulative, for one can simultaneously belong to several groups. An Indian, for instance, can be a Hindu, but an Indian can also be a Muslim. As a person constructs her/his identity based on these frameworks, s/he may have a shallow identification with traditional frameworks or reject specific frameworks, but s/he cannot completely disregard them because that would mean that s/he is “outside our space of interlocution” (31). In other words, one would lack points of identification with other people in society.

Most people care about their self-image and how it conforms with socially accepted standards but, as Taylor proposes, this portrayed image does not constitute selfhood, inasmuch as “the ideally strong character . . . would not be deterred by the adverse opinions of others” (33). Taylor proposes that what defines people’s identity is their orientation of what is good and essential to them. In *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Moraes struggles to accept the ambiguous and hybrid nature of his identity because he is just driven by social conventions, trying to act in accordance with his old body. Something similar happens to Amina Sinai, in *Midnight’s Children*, who embodies the role of a dedicated wife. In the following section, we will see how some characters deal with the contrasts between their own values and the social expectations imposed on them.

The constitution of the self never reaches a conclusive or comprehensive articulation (Taylor 34). As the self is introduced into its frameworks through language, one constantly negotiates one’s self-representations in conversations (Taylor 36). Taylor points out that one finds answers for the question Who am I? in constant interactions with others: “I define who I

am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation within which my most important defining relations are lived out” (35). One’s identity is constantly shaped by one’s interactions with others, that is, one’s family, relatives, and the people within the groups to which one belongs. Because of this dependency on others, the construction of a person’s identity “usually involves not only his stand on moral and spiritual matters but also some reference to a defining community” (Taylor 36). One’s self-definition is, therefore, the product of the intersections among the frameworks that guide one’s life.

The theories mentioned above analyze the relation of one’s self-interpretation in relation to others, the people with whom they interact. The same theories can be used to understand the construction of the invented self, that is, a fictional self-representation created for a variety of reasons. In the selected novels, for instance, Uma creates versions of herself to please others, Niccolò Vespucci tells stories to hide his true identity, and Abraham Zogoiby hides his secrets by telling a version of his life that facilitates his social interactions and maintains his good reputation. In the following sections, I show how the novels portray the characters whose identities are forged by themselves or by other characters, considering that the invented selves rely more on fictionalization than the autobiographical versions of the narrators’ selves.

### The Self-Inventors

In *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Adriana Cavarero affirms that the self is narratable because it goes through a spontaneous process of self-narration through memory that does not depend on one’s engagement in written or oral autobiographical storytelling (33-34). The invented selves analyzed in this section are not engaged in any

autobiographical writing, as Saleem and Moraes are. Neither do they tell the stories of their lives in an oral performance. They are usually secondary characters whose stories are contained in the narrators' narratives. The stories of the self-inventors demonstrate that the construction of one's identity through storytelling can also be experienced in small excerpt throughout one's life, without the presence of an overarching text. The condensed portion of their lives to which the reader has access also shows the complexity of the construction of personal identities and the impossibility of a unique and fixed definition of a national identity.

In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Moraes affirms that Vasco Miranda is "his own self-invention" (*The Moor* 157) because of his ability to move from a poor background into a new life, forgetting the past in order to construct a new version of his identity. However, Moraes shows us, Miranda fails to maintain a coherent persona. Uma Sarasvati, Abraham Zogoiby, and Niccolò Vespucci are other examples of self-inventors whose fictional selves are problematic. They create their invented selves as if they were creating characters for a story. Then, they sustain those personas by telling more stories. Nevertheless, in the end, their stories are not enough to cover their hidden identities.

Moraes describes Vasco Miranda as an eccentric person who wears "silly clothes," has his own "verbal inventions," and pays no respect to "all shibboleths, conventions, sacred cows, pomposities and gods" (*The Moor* 155). Moraes knows very little about Vasco's background because Vasco rarely talks about his life before he invites himself into Aurora's tutelage. Even though there is no record of Vasco's past, it is possible to infer that he comes from a poor background, for his portrait of Aurora is his first work on canvas. When becoming Aurora's protégé, Vasco "destroyed everything he had done before that date, declaring himself to be a new man who was only now making his real start in life; only now,

as he put it, being born” (*The Moor* 158). Vasco invents a persona that fits his new life better. He maintains his invented self for a long time because he has abandoned his old self.

As Vasco does not write an autobiography, his storytelling consists of pieces of personal accounts that he tells to the Zogoiby family, who becomes Vasco’s audience. Vasco’s main stories are related to Goan history and tales. He also tells the tale of the lost needle inside him, an object which Moraes interprets as “the source of [Vasco’s] soul” and a reason to live life to the fullest (*The Moor* 155). Interestingly, this tall tale eventually becomes Moraes’ main explanation for Vasco’s sudden death. Being part of the audience, Moraes provides his responses to Vasco’s account and fills the gaps of Vasco’s story in order to transmit it to the reader. Therefore, the reader’s interpretation of Vasco’s stories is contaminated by Moraes’ opinion.

As for visual storytelling, Vasco’s wall painting in the Zogoiby’s nursery is the first demonstration of the encounters of west and east that permeate Moraes’ narrative and Aurora’s paintings. The walls also reveal Vasco’s preference for the fictional world of his dreams over “the purely mimetic” realist representations of the world (*The Moor* 174). As Vasco tells Abraham: “a canvas is not a mirror” to reflect the world (*The Moor* 158). The walls of the nursery also foreshadow the shallowness of Vasco’s future paintings. Despite bringing together west and east traditions, his artistic production does not promote any social or political awareness, neither does it negotiate the hybrid aspect of his identity.

First described as having a humorous character, Vasco becomes an influential person in the Zogoiby household. He is the first to paint the Moor of Alhambra, which ends up inspiring Aurora to make her own version. When Abraham asks Vasco to paint a portrait of Aurora and her daughter Ina, Vasco ignores Ina completely and portrays only Aurora “sitting cross-legged on a giant lizard under her chhatri, cradling empty air. Her full breast, weighty with motherhood, was exposed” (*The Moor* 158). When Vasco finally reveals his work,

Abraham gets infuriated. Then, Vasco paints himself as the Moor of Alhambra on a white horse over Aurora's portrait. Vasco's self-representation as a moor is in fact an "appropriating of [Abraham's] surname and family tall-stories and such-mush personal material" (*The Moor* 160). Vasco wants to provoke Abraham because he has disapproved of Aurora's portrait, which remains in the lower layer of the canvas. The title of the painting, *The Artist as Boabdil, the Unlucky (el-Zogoybi), Last Sultan of Granada, Seen Departing from the Alhambra or The Moor's Last Sigh*, evinces Vasco's attempt to metaphorically usurp Abraham's heritage as a Moorish descendant. This episode forecasts Vasco's mimic reconstruction of the Alhambra palace and his assuming the persona of a moor at the end of his life in Spain.

After selling the painting, Vasco finds out that his work has commercial value. He moves from poverty to a financially successful life as his works become famous worldwide. Andrew Teverson explains that Vasco's works gain international fame "because [his style] is unthreatening and easy to peddle on the global market. It is, however, ideologically vacuous" (*Salman* 170). Teverson also affirms that Vasco's portfolio is basically "kitsch pastiche" that does not illustrate the historical and political moment of his time (*Salman* 171). As Moraes puts it, Vasco's works portray "bland, inoffensive concepts for which the owners of public buildings would pay truly surrealist sums, and after that his reputation – never very serious – declined as rapidly as his bank-balance increased" (*The Moor* 148). Vasco's paintings show a hollow kind of hybridity: a mixture of cultures without purpose or any political or social significance. They are the reflection of a lifetime of a person who seeks his own well-being and is not worried about the community in which he lives.

In spite of his positive influence on Aurora's artistic life, Vasco has a dark side. He frequently has bursts of anger and the attitudes of an evil spirit: "There was a Hell in Vasco, born of whatever devil-deal he had done to shed his past and be born again through us, and at

times he seemed capable of bursting into flames” (*The Moor* 165). His anger attack on India’s Independence Day reveals that the end of colonialism in India “destroyed the fragile equilibrium at the heart of his invented self, and set the madman free” (*The Moor* 165). At that night, Vasco reassures his Portuguese heritage saying that he would not be affected by that political transition.<sup>42</sup> When Goa is finally freed from the Portuguese rule, Vasco gets depressed and starts his own counter-revolution by recollecting Goan cuisine, history, and traditions in an attempt to cling on to his cultural background. Vasco constantly tries to maintain an attachment to a colonial time that does not exist anymore (Borges 133). This approximation to the colonizers’ culture grants Vasco with a false impression of superiority. Indeed, Vasco uses mimicry as a strategy to avoid dealing with his hybrid identity, which should include not only his Portuguese heritage but also the local culture. An identity constructed through mimicry is partial because it is the product of colonial discourses that seek to educate the local people into the colonizer’s culture while maintaining them in an inferior position (Bhabha, *Location* 129). Vasco’s problematic identity is the result of his refusal to embrace both parts of his identity.

Vasco’s increasing bad reputation and the superficiality of the themes portrayed in his works eventually compromise his artistic status in India. Then Vasco goes west to Benengeli, Spain, where he has built a version of Aurora’s fictional Mooristan, and becomes a parodical mimesis of the Moor. In Benengeli, Vasco spends “fortunes, and the kind of energy born of the most profound obsession, to appropriate her vision [of Mooristan] for himself” (*The Moor* 408). Assuming the persona of a Moorish sultan is not enough to satisfy Vasco’s desire for completion, which can be read as a symptom of his refusal to accept the Indian side of his identity. His *Little Alhambra* seems, at a first glance, the emulation of Aurora’s paintings:

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<sup>42</sup> India’s independence did not include the territories colonized by the Portuguese. The Portuguese dominance in Goa ended in 1961.



“In room after room I found the settings of Aurora’s pictures brought to life, and I half-expected her characters to walk in and enact their sad narratives” (*The Moor* 408).

Eventually, Moraes perceives that Vasco’s version of Mooristan does not illustrate the greatness of Aurora’s imaginary world. Vasco has gotten lost in the fictional identities he has created for himself. His Moorish persona is the culmination of a lifetime of partialities because Vasco leans on the figure of the colonizers to construct his self-representation, disregarding his Indian origin. The Portuguese and the Moorish traditions that Vasco incorporates into his self compose only a portion of his identity. His refusal to accept his hybrid nature compromises the construction of his identity and makes his life narrative become as shallow as his works. Vasco’s unstable self becomes the result of his resistance to the Indian aspects of his identity.

Interestingly, Vasco is indirectly responsible for the entrance of foreigners in the village of Benengeli, which was an unknown destination before Vasco’s arrival. Vasco becomes the first “parasite,” as the people in Benengeli call the foreigners who have moved to the village but have failed to incorporate to their identities the local language and traditions. Vasco’s moving to Benengeli may be read as an attempt to re-enact the Moorish colonization in Spain. However, Vasco is rejected by the villagers for his eccentric behavior, his elephant-like fountain, and his supposed paganism. Although Vasco identifies himself as a catholic Portuguese descendent, the villagers only see him as a representative of the Oriental cultures that corrupt the good nature of the Spanish people. Vasco becomes a cautionary example of the construction of identity based solely on mimesis. Despite using storytelling to reinforce his connection to the west, storytelling per se does not sustain his status as one of them.

As Moraes tells us: “Nobody could save Vasco from himself; whatever that was, whoever he might have been, or have become” (*The Moor* 157). Vasco is a performer who

acts in accordance with the fictional versions of his identity. What Vasco has attempted since his arrival in Elephanta until his final days in Benengeli is to forge the image of the person he wants to be, one that would substitute his past self and grant him some value. However, he continues to be “the same vulgarian he had always been” (*The Moor* 409). Vasco’s invented self begins as a strategy to forget his past, but he loses control over it. Always trying to prove himself: “poor, driven Vasco, crazed by history, love and the torment of keeping up the great pretence of himself” loses his mind in this attempt (*The Moor* 166). He is an example of what Bhabha defines as the result of “a flawed colonial mimesis” (*Location* 127), a person who looks like the colonizers but who is not one of them.

The second self-inventor is Abraham Zogoiby. Storytelling has been part of his life since his childhood. Back then, Abraham experienced stories in two major ways: first, through the tiles in the synagogue that reveal stories about the Jews in Cochin and that supposedly inform Abraham of his father’s adventures around the world; second, through the stories told by his mother. Abraham eventually retells these stories to his children. One of these stories is about the last Moor of Alhambra. Right after retelling this story, Moraes debunks Abraham’s version and classifies it as a fairy tale. Through this tale, Moraes introduces the reader to the Zogoiby’s tradition of telling stories to hide crimes, inasmuch as the story of the Moor and the Jewish girl may be a cover-up of Flory Zogoiby’s participation in a gang of emerald smugglers (*The Moor* 85). Moraes also uses this tall tale to reinforce the veracity of his own story and invites the reader to judge both stories, his and his father’s.

Despite the dubious veracity of the story, Moraes incorporates the Moor’s story into his life narrative, as his father also does, because it contributes to the construction of his self-representation as a Moorish descendent. Unable to prove his blood relation to Boabdil, both Abraham and Moraes reinforce the connection to him through storytelling. As Moraes affirms, “The truth of such stories lies in what they reveal about the protagonists’ hearts,

rather than their deeds” (*The Moor* 135). Through the combination of fictional accounts of different levels, Moraes has shown the reader that the veracity of stories is not the central point in his narrative, inasmuch as his stories reveal characteristics, objectives, fears, and expectations about the characters involved in them.

Aware of the power of storytelling, Abraham constructs a public persona to hide his secret life. His public persona is actually created by Aurora, who humiliates him in front of her guests by describing him as “a weak, diminished figure” (*The Moor* 169). Instead of retaliating, Abraham assumes that persona as his public image and combines it with his own stories, moments of silence (as the one mentioned above), and other people’s testimonies, such as the employees who Abraham bribes to take the blame for his crimes. In sum, Abraham Zogoiby uses stories to maintain a public persona in order to hide the criminal he has become: “The truth about Abraham Zogoiby was that he had put on a disguise; had created a mild-mannered secret identity to mask his covert super-nature. He had deliberately painted the dullest possible picture of himself . . . over the thrilling but unacceptable reality” (*The Moor* 179-80). Abraham’s public persona covers a list of wrongdoings and crimes: affairs, debts, blackmail, women trafficking, drug dealing, frauds, bribery, money laundry, and terrorism. Abraham’s invented self allows him to remain free from any suspicion. When he is finally confronted with his crimes, his consistent self-representation stands out over the accusations and Abraham is acquitted of the allegations. The reader, however, is constantly reminded of Abraham’s hidden self. As Moraes knows the whole story when he tells it, his narrative is filled with commentaries that reinforce the discrepancy between the stories Abraham creates to public consumption and the stories he reveals to Moraes.

Despite having the name of a virtuous biblical character, Abraham Zogoiby lacks righteousness. His gods are money and power and he usually seeks his own benefit. Every move in his life is part of a plan to guarantee his success. As Nicole Thiara has pointed out,

“Abraham becomes a destructive, deceitful and ruthless character unconstrained by moral and ethical considerations” (*Salman* 155). Abraham Zogoiby even promises his then unborn son to his mother so that he can pay off some business loss. He manipulates Moraes into killing Fielding for Aurora’s murder, despite being the real murderer. He also makes Moraes confront Vasco Miranda in order to rescue Aurora’s paintings. Like the heroes painted in Moraes’ nursery room, Abraham lives a double life:

The city itself, perhaps the whole country, was a palimpsest, Under World beneath Over World, black market beneath white; when the whole of life was like this, when an invisible reality moved phantomwise beneath a visible fiction, subverting all its meanings, how then could Abraham’s career have been any different? How could any of us have escaped that deadly layering? (*The Moor* 184)

Abraham’s invented self hides his invisible businesses and sustain his public persona as a distinguished man committed to his family and as the owner of a profitable spice business. Abraham also uses storytelling to portray himself as a victim of Aurora’s infidelities and the hidden schemes inside his company.

Abraham’s double life begins when he loses his fortune on a failed business. Then, he goes to his mother, Flory, for help, continuing a lifetime of secrets and hidden treasures. Abraham, who once despises his heritage for its bastard origin, substitutes moral standards for the law of convenience. Taylor attributes the acquirement of “moral and spiritual discernment” through “the ongoing conversation” first to one’s parents and, then, to “a defining community” (35-36). If one learns good moral standards by personal interactions, one can also learn the art of secrecy. With his mother, Abraham learns that he can have a secret life as long as he tells the right story.

Abraham comes from a Jewish lineage that promiscuously intersects with the Moorish culture, for he is a descendent from the out-of-wedlock union of a Jew and the last Moor of

Granada, Boabdil the Misfortunate: *El-zogoybi* (*The Moor* 82). Because of this bastard origin, Abraham rejects this framework that constitutes a great portion of his hybrid identity. His scorn for his own background culminates in his participation in a terrorist attack against Jews, as the manufacturer of “the so-called Islamic bomb” (*The Moor* 341). When Moraes refuses to be involved in such activities, Abraham mocks him: “You’ll be wanting a yarmulke now . . . and phylacteries. Lessons in Hebrew, a one-way trip to Jerusalem?” (*The Moor* 341). Despite not having strong connections to the Jewish part of the family, Moraes respect this aspect of his identity. In contrast, Abraham substitutes his hybrid ancestry for whatever is more profitable.

When Abraham is finally judged for his crimes, he reminds the jury of his public persona. After decades of performing the role of a good citizen, he should not be treated as less than that. As Cavarero points out, “[T]he identity of the self, crystalized in the story, is totally constituted by the relations of her appearance to others in the world” (36). Abraham’s invented self becomes his official image to the world. Therefore, people treat him in accordance with the persona portrayed in the narrative that he has constructed throughout his business career.

In addition, Abraham benefits from his high social position in society. As Jens Brockmeier and Rom Harré have pointed out, the locus of enunciation influences the audience’s acceptance of one’s argument, inasmuch as “stories are told from ‘positions’, that is, they ‘happen’ in local moral orders in which the rights and duties of persons as speakers influence the location of the prime authorial voice” (46). Abraham’s social class grants him the right to speak and be heard. His position also facilitates his interference in the trial by providing people to take the blame for his crimes and concealing pieces of proof of his involvement. Without that prominent position, Abraham’s stories would not have the same effects.

The third self-inventor is Uma Sarasvati, who tells new stories about herself to conceal the past and to highlight her personal achievements. Uma is a 20-year-old art student who becomes famous for her religious-related sculptures.<sup>43</sup> She represents the generation that substitutes Aurora's. Among all the characters listed in this chapter, she is the one whose invented selves are the most unstable, for she creates different autobiographical stories depending on whom she is addressing. Embodying Lacan's imaginary order, Uma becomes a type of mirror that reflects the image of her addressee as she changes her autobiographical story in order to match her listener's expectations and desires. In fact, this strategy reveals her own urge to be the object of other's desire.

Instead of performing to a group of people, Uma prefers to have a private moment with each of her listeners. This strategy allows her to emphasize the area of her life that will most attract her listener. When Uma first meets the Zogoibys, she portrays herself as a "dedicated secularist marxian feminist" to Mynah, a spiritual woman to Sister Floreas, a financial expert to Abraham, and to Jimmy Cash, she is the incarnation of his departed wife, Ina, but "with a singing voice, and . . . brains" (*The Moor* 243). To Moraes, only Uma can see the young man under his old man's body. This approach also helps Uma manipulate Moraes, for there is seldom a third party to attest to whether or not Uma is telling the truth. Thus, Moraes ends up believing in her version of the stories. The ambiguity of Uma's narrative reveals her ability to know exactly what to tell in her stories, when, and how to tell her stories. This strategy shows that the effectiveness of stories is not determined solely by their content, but by external factors, such as the audience, the place, and the time of narration (Polletta et al. 115).

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<sup>43</sup> Uma is an alternative name for the Hindu goddess Parvati, known as a loving wife and mother ("Parvati"). Sarasvati is a reference to another Hindu goddess known as a patroness of the arts ("Sarasvati").

Not enchanted by Uma's spell, Aurora suspects Uma's reliability. She hires a detective to investigate Uma's past and finds out that Uma has lied about her homeland, her parents, and her marital status. She also learns about Uma's mental illness and "[h]er ability to take on radically different personas in the company of different people – to become what she guessed a given man or woman (but usually man) would find most appealing" (*The Moor* 265-66). As the investigation reveals, it is not the first time Uma creates stories about her life: "she would invent long, elaborated personal histories of great vividness, and would cling to them obstinately, even when confronted with internal contradictions in her rigmaroles, or with the truth" (*The Moor* 266). Uma creates new stories to substitute the truth about her past, especially in regard to her parents' abandoning her after they become aware of her mental disorder. In her new version of her story, her parents supposedly have tragic deaths: her mother hangs herself and her father puts himself on fire. However, according to the investigation, they are still alive. Unable of processing this parental rejection, Uma reinvents herself every time she meets someone. By incorporating the desire of the other, Uma reduces the chance of being rejected again.

Thiara attributes Uma's invented selves to the character's incapacity "to turn her past into a meaningful continuous narrative [so] she persistently invents herself entirely anew" (Thiara, *Salman* 187). Similarly to Vasco Miranda, Uma loses herself in her fictional narratives and she "no longer [has] a clear sense of an 'authentic' identity that was independent of these performances" (*The Moor* 266). The use of the word performance in this quotation highlights the theatrical and, therefore, the fictional aspect of her selves. Through Uma, the novel shows the downfall of embodying too many identities. In seeking to find an identity that pleases others, Uma loses her own. She is constantly in character, trying to portray herself as a distinguished person, in regard to her social engagement, artistic achievements, religious ideals, and financial success. She feels an uncontrolled urge to be

desired, so she creates personas that will help her fulfill this impulse. Her hybrid identity does not derive from a process of cultural synthesis. The layers of self-signification that Uma adds to her identity do not connect to the main storyline of her life. This superficiality compromises the consistency of her narrative.

Aurora's first portrayal of Uma on canvas appears in *Mother-Naked Moor Watches Chimène's Arrival*, a painting on which Moraes, not disguised as the Moor, gazes Uma (Chimène) from a distance instead of looking in the mirror right in front of him. This painting foreshadows Uma's tragic ending and the upcoming destruction of Bombay. According to Thiara, Aurora's portrayal of Uma/Chimène on her canvas evinces Aurora's "increasing loss of faith in her powers to persuade the world to develop according to her vision, and she partly admits defeat as other visions rival hers and seem to be victorious" (*Salman* 185). Uma destroys Aurora's relationship with Moraes by feeding him with denigrating stories about his family and, simultaneously, turning his parents against him. Her strategy results in Moraes' expulsion from his household. Uma's invented selves succeed to a certain extent because she really believes in the parts she is playing. When she proposes a suicidal pact to Moraes, she ends up losing her life, but she does not compromise her performance.

Like Abraham, Uma is driven by a desire to be socially accepted, but Uma's mental instability and her frequent reconfigurations of her invented selves prevent her from covering her tracks and from keeping a consistent persona. As Moraes concludes, "[I]t had been the pluralist Uma, with her multiple selves, her highly inventive commitment to the infinite malleability of the real, her modernistically provisional sense of truth, who had turned out to be the bad egg" (*The Moor* 272). As Uma's construction of invented selves occurs in the symbolic order, she can rely on the malleability of words and the fictionality of narratives to forge new versions of herself. Whereas Moraes uses storytelling to negotiate his hybrid identity in accordance with his family heritage, the history of his country, and his social



position, Uma ignores the frameworks that should guide the articulation of her identity and reinvents herself in each autobiographical retelling. Her storytelling style resembles the ability of a storyteller to adapt his/her story to new contexts and audiences. However, as her versions vary a great deal, she is not able to sustain the stories she has created.

In Moraes' opinion, Aurora should have accepted Uma's hybrid personality instead of persecuting her. However, Uma's multiple selves, like Vasco's and Abraham's, do not accord well with Aurora's idea of hybridity as the product of the negotiation between distinct cultures. They epitomize "a failed hybridisation: a multiplicity of identity that is the result of madness, instability or immorality rather than a finely balanced, materially realistic and ideologically grounded sense of the hybrid nature of the self" (Teverson, *Salman* 174). Hybridity in Uma, Vasco, and Abraham does not generate any type of social awareness or cultural negotiation. In fact, these characters seem to despise their hybrid nature. Vasco is obsessed with his connection with the Portuguese, denying the Indian part of his identity. Abraham rejects the Jewish community and their traditions. Uma ignores her own personality altogether, substituting it for what befits her at the moment.

Another possessor of multiple invented selves is Niccolò Vespucci, a character in *The Enchantress of Florence*.<sup>44</sup> He resembles Rashid Khalifa in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, for they are both traditional representations of storytellers. Nevertheless, Niccolò combines his stories with magic tricks, which enhances his artistic performance. Another difference between them lies in their roles as narrators. Whereas Rashid tells stories in a third-person perspective, Niccolò sometimes assumes the position of the character and tells the story in a first-person narrative.

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<sup>44</sup> As I have already analyzed Niccolò's storytelling and its impact on his personal identity and the collective memory of the Mughal Empire in chapter five, here I concentrate the discussion on the creation of his invented selves.

Through Niccolò, readers can clearly see the distinction between his so-called true self and his invented versions. Whereas Uma just adds new stories to her repertoire, Niccolò creates new characters in order to conceal his identity. Each one has his own story and speaks a different language. Niccolò fluently speaks seven languages: Italian, Spanish, Arabic, Persian, Russian, English, and Portuguese, which helps his characters sound more convincing. His mastering several languages highlights the hybrid nature of his identity and epitomizes Lacan's theory of the construction of identity through language, for Niccolò is always recreating himself through storytelling. Differently from Uma, Niccolò seems to have a stable notion of who he is. By giving different names to his invented selves, he maintains a distance between his personality and his performances. This distinction reinforces his role as the main storyteller in *The Enchantress of Florence*. His main story is aimed at Akbar, the emperor of the Mughal empire but he performs other stories on his way to Fatehpur Sikri.

Aboard captain Sir John Hauksbank's ship, Niccolò introduces himself as Uccello di Firenze, an "enchanter and scholar" who speaks "perfect English" (*Enchantress* 16). Under this name, Niccolò Vespucci poisons the captain of Scáthach and steals a letter from the Queen of England to the Emperor of India. The letter becomes Niccolò's open sesame to the Mughal court. To Hauksbank, Niccolò tells stories and performs magic tricks, using all the enchanting power of words to convince the captain of his good intentions. Afterwards, he leaves the name Uccello di Firenze behind, like "the abandoned skin of a snake" (*Enchantress* 26), and assumes a new name, Mogor dell' Amore. This analogy to the most deceiving of animals, according to the Christian tradition, highlights the trickery and unreliability that the third-person narrator tends to associate with Niccolò. Knowing how Niccolò has acquired the letter (mis)leads the reader to distrust Niccolò's story. This misleading also increases the surprising effect of the discovery of Niccolò's actual parentage.

When Niccolò is finally in Akbar's court, he introduces himself in perfect Persian as Mogor dell' Amore, "a Mughal born out of wedlock," a Florentine citizen (*Enchantress* 98). Eventually, Lord Hauksbank's crew traces him to Akbar's court. Their arrival compromises his performance because they reveal Niccolò's deceiving character. Lord Hauksbank's crew accuses Niccolò of lying about his identity and killing their captain. This situation ends up raising questions about the reliability of Niccolò's tales. However, there is another moment when the interruption ends up benefitting him. Hamida Bano, the emperor's mother, and Gulbadan Begum, his aunt, validate Niccolò's story by confirming the existence of the hidden princess.

Niccolò's storytelling is also interactive and communal, for his story is constructed with contributions from some members of the Mughal court. *The Enchantress of Florence* is an example of the potency of stories to contain the collective memory of a people. In a collective act of storytelling, Niccolò learns things about his past that he would not know otherwise. His story also becomes a counter-story to the official version of the Mughal history, which fails to mention Qara Kōz in its archives. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, the reader can see the potency of (counter-)stories to share and preserve personal and collective memory.

In sum, the self-inventors rely on storytelling and fictionalization in a broader way than the autobiographical selves do. The stories the self-inventors create help them manage their public image, control a given situation, and manipulate other people's impressions about them. Although their reasons may vary, they tell stories about themselves to hide a part of their lives or their selves, be it their past, their illegal business, or their so-called true identity (who they are when nobody is observing them).

### Created by Others

Differently from the self-inventors described in the previous section, Amina Sinai, the Mirror, and Jodhabai have their identities, entirely or partially, forged by characters who have some power over them. Amina's name is changed by her husband in order to mark a new beginning in their lives. The Mirror molds herself in accordance with her Master Qara Kōz's identity. Finally, Jodha is born out of nothing through Akbar's enchanting power of imagination and storytelling. As we have seen above, one's identity is constantly influenced by others who are part of one's community. However, the construction of these characters' identities is determined by exterior factors and people, rather than by their own desires, stories, and self-knowledge.

In *The Enchantress of Florence*, Mahesh Das is a young poor Brahmin who gets a new life after Akbar befriends him. The emperor renames the boy to Raja Birbal and makes him a prince. Birbal becomes one of the emperor's closest counselors (*Enchantress* 110). Something similar happens in *Midnight's Children*. When Mumtaz Aziz marries her second husband, Ahmed Sinai, he renames her Amina Sinai: "Adam Aziz lifted his daughter (with his own arms), passing her up after the dowry into the care of this man who had renamed and so reinvented her, thus becoming in a sense her father as well as her new husband" (*Midnight* 84-85).<sup>45</sup> Even though Ahmed has divorced his first spouse as well, Amina is the only one whose name is changed. This evinces her inferior position in their relationship and also a sense of possession on Ahmed's part, as if the renaming erased Amina's previous marriage. In practice, Amina finds a way out of this imposition, making Ahmed resemble her first husband.

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<sup>45</sup> Mumtaz is a common Muslim name for boys and girls. It means excellent and exceptional. Amina means honest, faithful. It is the name of Prophet Muhammad's mother.

In the Bible, several characters have names that correspond to an attribute, a personality trait or to the circumstances of their birth. The name Jacob, for example, describes the condition of this character's birth, for he "came out with his hand holding Esau's heel" and reveals his proneness to cheating (*The Holy Bible*, Gen. 25:26).<sup>46</sup> When Jacob encounters God, his name is changed to Israel, for he has "striven with God and with men, and [has] prevailed" (Gen. 32:28). In the biblical tradition, changing one's name after a significant event marks a transformation, a rite of passage, and a new beginning. In *Midnight's Children*, Ahmed's renaming Mumtaz stands as a symbol of her becoming a different person and the beginning of Amina's journey into a new marriage and a new life.

After being renamed, Amina tries to love her new husband and assumes the role of a dedicated wife, a character that she plays perfectly. Nevertheless, under the surface, she continues to be Mumtaz, a girl who is still in love with her first husband, Nadir Khan. In fact, Amina makes Ahmed look like Nadir and she arranges her new house so that it resembles the old basement where she used to live with him (*Midnight* 88). Amina externalizes her repressed love towards Nadir Khan by turning Ahmed into a "copy" of her first love. However, she does not succeed in transferring the love she feels from Nadir to Ahmed, even after trying to love Ahmed in fragments. Giving her a new name is a way to forget her previous marriage and start a new life, but as Amina has not forgotten Nadir Khan, she ends up living a mimicry of her old life, a life that was denied to her when she was obliged to divorce her first husband.<sup>47</sup> She challenges her invented self by secretly remaining Mumtaz, keeping what is essential in her identity.

Her secret love to Nadir Khan is not her only secret. After Ahmed Sinai's business fails and his assets are frozen, Amina struggles for her family's well-being, by secretly

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<sup>46</sup> "Jacob means *He takes by the heel, or He cheats*" (Gen. 25:26 note).

<sup>47</sup> After about two years of marriage, Nadir divorces Amina after her parents find out that she is still a virgin.

sponsoring the judicial process with the money she wins in horse races (*Midnight* 192-193). Although she actively assumes the role of the head of the family, she never leaves the image of a good wife behind. This is not the first time Amina has to live a double life. While Nadir Khan takes refuge in the Aziz household, Nadir and Mumtaz fall in love and get married in secret. Only her family knows about it. During the day, Amina plays the character of a single woman living with her parents. She continues attending the university even though it does not interest her anymore. At night, she assumes her role as a married wife in a secret chamber under her parents' house. Her life has been divided into two when she marries Nadir and, it seems that she does not know how to live otherwise.

Amina's social life is a determinant factor in her identity, for she is defined by her relationship with her family. Most of her actions are guided by her preoccupation about other people's need. According to Thiara, Amina depends on her husband(s) to define herself (*Salman* 67). When she loses Nadir for the second time, she starts to age faster (*Midnight* 367). Furthermore, when she is momentarily separated from Ahmed, she feels like her life has no purpose (*Midnight* 399). Amina's whole life is an act of resilience. As it changes very often, she is always adapting herself. However, she maintains a connection with her old self, Mumtaz.

Amina's story is constructed on the margins, for she is one of several characters whose stories are embedded in Saleem's narrative. Thus, the reader does not have direct access to her voice and to her perspective of the story. In addition, her storyline is, to a certain extent, contaminated by Saleem's feelings towards her, which vary from admiration to jealousy. In fact, Saleem only knows his mother's story because of his ability to read people's mind. Amina lacks a place of enunciation where she can tell her own story. This lack may be a consequence of her subservient position in her household, which opposes to the active role she eventually assumes as the main provider in her family. Despite her struggles to maintain

her family together, her voice is not entirely heard, neither are her deeds acknowledged by her family. Although she creates a story to counter other people's stories about her, especially her husband's, her story remains private.

Amina is not the only character who is (re-)invented by a husband. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, Akbar uses his enchanting powers to create Jodhabai out of his imagination: "a dream made flesh, a traveler from the world of *khayal*, fancy" (336). According to Coskun, Jodha's creation shows how the barrier between fiction and history is feeble: "while Qara Köz loses her place in history upon Babur's decree, Jodha is included into history by Akbar, which undermines the reliability of history texts" (41). In both cases, the rulers use their political positions to change the historical records and impose on their people a fabricated version of the story (Coskun 41).

Through Jodha, the reader can see an extrapolation of Walter Benjamin's concept of storytelling, for her story is based not only on a person's life, but also on the combination of the stories of several women. Despite her apparent freedom, she does not have the power to change her imaginary nature, to tell her own story or to determine her future. Her existence is dependable on the emperor's will. Hence, her freedom is illusory because she is not the narrator of her own narrative. She is rather a secondary character in another person's story.

Jodha is the embodiment of the emperor's idea of the perfect wife: "No real woman was ever like that, so perfectly attentive, so undemanding, so endlessly available. She was an impossibility, a fantasy of perfection" (*Enchantress* 38). Maybe "embodiment" would not be the correct word here, inasmuch as Jodha does not exist in the material world. Although the idea of a perfect wife is illusory, the other wives "feared her, knowing that, being impossible, she was irresistible, and that was why the king loved her best" (*Enchantress* 48). They also despise her because of "her theft of their histories" (*Enchantress* 48). Born an adult, like Eve, Jodha is "a woman without a past, separate from history" (*Enchantress* 51). Akbar steals

traces of personality and other characteristics from his other wives in order to put her story together: “He said she was the daughter of the prince Jodhpur. She was not! . . . The emperor also believed his fictitious beloved was the mother of his firstborn son . . . But she was not Prince Salim’s real mother . . . the limitless beauty of the imaginary queen came from one consort, her Hindu religion from another, and her uncountable wealth from yet a third” (*Enchantress* 48). Akbar’s fictional stories about Jodha sustain her in the realm of the real inside the novel. In addition, Abdus Samad’s portrait of the imaginary queen helps the court see her as a person: “all acknowledged not only her existence but also her beauty, her wisdom, the grace of her movements, and the softness of her voice” (*Enchantress* 30). Kluwick explains that “the painter complements the emperor’s imaginative feat and turns the imaginary queen into a real— although still not actually existing— persona for the rest of the court” (56). Jodha is born out of storytelling in oral and visual manifestations. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, Rushdie extrapolates the limits of the material world and of imagination itself through the portrayal of Jodha.

Jodha’s existence depends on Akbar, her creator and the author of her story. Her main interest is the emperor and she has never wished to leave the palace. Nevertheless, she has acquired an independent personality. She has her own opinions and she advocates for the people in Fatehpur Sikri. For instance, she tells Akbar that the construction of the city is interrupted and all the population is obliged to remain silent whenever he returns from battles. Akbar promptly replaces his minister and revokes the order for the oppressive silence (*Enchantress* 32). As the story proceeds, “She was [Akbar’s] mirror because he had created her that way but she was herself as well. Yes. Now that the act of creation was complete she was free to be the person he had created, free, as everyone was, within the bounds of what it was in their nature to be and do” (*Enchantress* 52). She sees herself as a free person, but she is in fact confined to the walls of the palace. Should she still exist far from the emperor’s



reach? Probably not. Apart from the emperor, she has no company. She wanders around the palace by herself, like a ghost, a shadow, a breeze. Jodha is created by Akbar himself to fulfil his desires and, thus, her life is conditioned to his will. As the emperor loses interest in her, Jodha starts fading until she disappears. Eventually she is substituted by Qara Köz's ghost.

Despite the magical aspect of her creation, Jodha is not entirely Rushdie's invention. She is one of the characters that seems to be fictional but are based on historical characters, or in this case, rumors. In an interview to Robert Siegel, Rushdie tells him about "this curious legend of this Hindu queen who [Akbar] fell in love with and, to show his tolerance, he did not ask her to convert to Islam and indeed continued to observe her religious practices alongside his own, it's a happy legend for India, because you can see that it's a myth of inclusion and tolerance" (Rushdie, "Rushdie's Latest Novel"). Although Jodha is known in the Indian population as Akbar's wife, there is no register in the Indian history that confirms her existence.

In the novel, the imaginary queen epitomizes how reality enters the literary world through the three fictionalizing acts proposed by Wolfgang Iser: selection, combination, and *as-if* construction.<sup>48</sup> The relation among the three fictionalizing acts helps us understand how stories are constructed and how they combine fictional and extratextual references. Selection refers to the textual reference to extratextual sources. Some parts of Jodha's characterization derive from the supposedly real queen, such as her name and her religion. As for combination, it refers to the intratextual dynamics among the characters. In the novel, Jodha is formed by the synthesis of both Akbar's imagination, the other wives' stolen features, and the artistic portrait of the queen. Finally, the *as-if* construction refers to the idea of having a character create another character through storytelling, which reveals the fictionalization of the novel. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, the fictional aspects of the novel and the

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<sup>48</sup> See chapter two for more details.

references to historical figures and events intermingle in such a way that it becomes a challenge to distinguish one from the other.

The last invented self is the Mirror of the enchantress: a girl without name, past or a personal identity. Although her nickname reminds us of Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, the Mirror does not represent Qara Köz's desire for completion because the text shows that the beauty of the Mirror, although similar, does not surpass the enchantress'. The Mirror, the narrator observes, "looked like a mirror image of the royal lady, only faintly inferior to the original in pulchritude and charm, was also a beauty to adore" (*Enchantress* 252). On that matter, Kluwick affirms that the distinction between copy and original is a convention based on their political positions. Outside this scheme, Köz and the Mirror are two similar women who embody "the male fantasy of the perfect woman" (91). Even though the Mirror is not an exact copy of her master, her identity is framed by Köz's appearance and personality up to the point when the Mirror becomes pregnant and she no longer resembles Köz.

Having assisted Köz since she was a girl, the Mirror has her name changed by the people in the Mughal court who recognize the resemblance between the two girls: Köz "had a pretty playmate and maidservant, too, a young slave girl who was just as beautiful and looked so much like her mistress that people started calling her 'the princess's mirror'" (*Enchantress* 116). Her previous name falls in disuse, for she is defined by her function in society. In a master-servant relation, the servant does not usually possess much autonomy. In their case, the Mirror loses her authenticity and transforms herself into an extension of her master: "She is the shadow that shines. Who wins [Köz], gets her as well" (*Enchantress* 245). When Argalia renames Qara Köz Angelica, the Mirror inherits her new name. Köz comments: "'If I am to be Angelica, . . . then this guardian angel of mine will be an Angelica too'" (*Enchantress* 245). Void of a personal identity, the Mirror becomes an echo of Köz's beauty. They speak the same languages, share the same bed and the same men. For Qara Köz,

the Mirror stands as a reminder of her past, for they are both foreigners and belong in the same place. When Köz looks at the Mirror, she does not see herself, she sees the land of her childhood.

The Mirror's location of enunciation is limited to her Master's speech. The rare moments when the Mirror speaks and she echoes Qara Köz's sentences or speaks on her Master's behalf. Through the Mirror, the novel shows the influence of dominant narratives over one's personal identity, inasmuch as the Mirror is excluded from the storytelling act that defines her. Her identity is, therefore, determined by other people's stories about her. In addition, her subaltern position in society prevents her from producing a counter-story to defy the dominant narratives that limit her.<sup>49</sup> These narratives are rooted in her identity in such a way that she does not know how to define herself otherwise.

Similar but not the same, the Mirror continues in a subservient position throughout her life. She is finally free of her role when she gets pregnant, which breaks her connection to the enchantress permanently. However, as the Mirror's daughter looks like her mother and, consequently, like Qara Köz, she becomes the new Angelica, the continuation of the enchantress of Florence, who has already passed away when the girl is born. The Mirror passes her function in society to her daughter as if it were a kind of inheritance.

In the novels selected for this doctoral dissertation, all the Indian characters are hybrid, due to their postcolonial position. They also epitomize the multiplicity of the Indian people, who are no longer objects for a colonialist discourse, but subjects of their own

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<sup>49</sup> The Mirror is an example of the subaltern, a term coined by Gayatri Spivak that refers to a person belonging to the working class whose speech is not as prominent as the people in upper classes. Subaltern also designates and identifies the colonial populations who are socially, politically, and geographically excluded from the hierarchy of power of an imperial colony and from the metropolitan homeland of an empire. Traditionally, the subalterns were not allowed to move upward in society. They were also excluded from cultural productions in the colonies ("The New Subaltern" 325). Therefore, the subaltern consciousness used to be inserted into the dominant group's writing ("The New Subaltern" 336). Nowadays, the subalterns are not prevented from ascending to higher classes ("The New Subaltern" 325). Democracy and economic development have granted minority groups more space for participation in society and social mobility ("The New Subaltern" 332-33). According to Spivak, the new subalterns are those who are not part of the mainstream culture, democratic actions, such as voting, and economic development.

narratives. If the duplicity of the postcolonial subject is well represented through the narrators Saleem and Moraes, it reaches another level of complexity when we think about the invented selves listed above. The concept of invented selves shows the possibility of fictionalizing one's identity, not only in autobiographies, but as an integral part of one's construction of identity. As Bhabha reminds us, "[I]dentity is never an a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality" (*The Location* 73). Storytelling, thus, becomes a device through which Rushdie's characters negotiate their hybrid identities. Storytelling also allows the construction of fictional selves that, partially or completely, conceal some of these characters' identities.

## 7. Conclusion

Since our childhood, we use stories to make sense of the world around us, to understand ourselves, and to portray our identity to the world. In “Wonder Tales,” Rushdie affirms that “[s]tory is the unnatural means we use to talk about human life, our way of reaching the truth by making things up.” The selected storytellers are driven by their certainty that everyone should have the opportunity to tell his/her story. As Saleem claims in *Midnight’s Children*, “[N]o sane human being ever trusts someone else’s version more than his own” (292). In the beginning of their narratives, these storytellers think they have a coherent story to tell their audience but, in the end, they realize that the process of storytelling has changed them. The act of telling their stories gives these storytellers a better understanding of their personal, collective, and national identities and reminds them of the importance of others’ contribution to their narratives and their lives as a whole.

The present dissertation has built on the existing body of knowledge of Rushdie’s works by providing an analysis of the selected novels in close proximity to the selection of theoretical works. This combination enhances our reading of the selected novels, inasmuch as the theories mentioned here explain the dynamics between storytelling and identity. Walter Benjamin’s description of the storyteller helps us understand the close link between a person’s life and oral storytelling. Adriana Cavarero calls our attention to the fact that our memory goes through a continuous process of storytelling as it remembers, forgets, and re-signifies past events. Their ideas illuminate my analysis of the characters’ storytelling.

The theories on national identities elaborated by Homi Bhabha, Ernest Renan, and Benedict Anderson enhance our knowledge of the characters’ understanding of their role in society and help us understand how their nation has molded their identities. Maurice Halbwachs’ and Ron Eyerman’s theories on collective memory ground the analysis of the elaboration of Qara Köz’s story through collective remembering. Finally, John Locke, Linda

Anderson, Jacques Lacan's works on subjectivity corroborate the examination of the characters' process of recollecting and re-signifying the past through storytelling. These are few examples of the body of theoretical works that ground the elaboration of the present dissertation.

The present doctoral dissertation has shown how storytelling contributes to the characters' construction of their identities. In the selected novels, (counter-)storytelling, mainly through acts of autobiographical narratives, allows the characters to understand that their identities are not constructed in isolation. Other people's stories about them, the Indian history, and the political context of their times also influence their identities. Storytelling, in oral, visual or written forms, provides these characters with an opportunity to revisit the past in order to envision their future.

In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Rushdie plays with the limits of the fictional and the real worlds in the novel when he allows these apparently distinct worlds to intersect each other: first, when Haroun and Rashid travel to the fictional world of Kahani and, then, when the artificial rain of happy endings, produced in Kahani, is poured into these characters' so-called real world. It is a story about hybridity, about the effects of storytelling in the real world, about creativity and imagination. The other three novels bring forward the history of the colonial period in India. They trace Indian history back to the imperialist endeavors of the British Empire in *Midnight's Children*, the Portuguese settlement in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and the Mughal Empire in *The Enchantress of Florence*. Together these four works show us the relation between storytelling and the construction of personal, collective, and national identities. In postcolonial studies, storytelling is always a counter-storytelling, for postcolonial novels, such as Rushdie's, provide alternative representations of ex-colonials, subverting stereotyped generalizations that prevent outsiders from knowing the multiplicity of Indian people and their culture.

*Haroun and the Sea of Stories* shows us the storyteller as a performer and how stories impact the lives of his audience. The novel is also a defense of freedom of speech and a warning against the dangers of the oversimplification of binary oppositions. *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* portray narrators who ponder on their life journeys while writing their autobiographies. Through storytelling, Saleem and Moraes understand their relationship with their families, their immediate community, and their nation. In *Midnight's Children*, we see how personal and national identities intersect each other and, in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, we see how Moraes takes into account the influence of other peoples, such as the Portuguese, the Jews, and the Moors, into the construction of Indian identities and into his own personal identity. The novel also shows how Moraes' life is affected by the national events of his time. Finally, *The Enchantress of Florence* introduces readers to the Mughal Empire in India and its mirror-like relationship with Florence during the Renaissance period. Niccolò Vespucci, the main storyteller, arrives in Fatehpur Sikri with a story to tell, but he soon finds out that his story is just a chapter in the Mughal history. Storytelling in *The Enchantress of Florence* becomes a collective act of remembering the past and reconstructing it, as several characters contribute to Niccolò's storyline. *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *The Enchantress of Florence* are also cautionary about the articulation of, or resistance to, hybridity, for it can manifest itself in a shallow or manipulated manner.

In oral performances, in written texts, or on canvas, storytelling becomes the main tool that Rushdie's characters use to make sense of whom they are. Storytelling can also be used to forge invented selves, that is, fictionalized versions of one's identity, produced to conceal one's supposedly true self or a secret part of one's life. As chapter six shows, several characters tell fictional stories about themselves in order to manipulate how others see themselves. Storytelling also allows Akbar to create his imaginary wife, in *The Enchantress of Florence*, in combination with visual representations of the queen and the stories stolen

from Akbar's other wives. Together they compose the past and the identity of a woman who is present, but who does not exist.

In visual, oral or written forms, counter-storytelling has been a powerful tool for postcolonial subjects to become the narrators of their own narratives and to defy Orientalist preconceptions about them. Being part of this tradition, Rushdie's novels explore the plurality of the Indian people by showing a range of characters and their traditions, religions, social classes, and languages. They also expose the differences between how the characters see themselves and how the world sees them. The selected novels demonstrate that identities can be (re-)created through acts of storytelling. Even when the stories are not autobiographical accounts, they reveal their characters' fears and desires about their future. In the selected novels, storytelling is the means by which the narrators/storytellers reveal themselves to the world and, consequently, learn more about themselves in the process.



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