

Györke Ágnes: Postmodern Nations in Salman Rushdie's Fiction

PhD Dissertation

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Introduction: Postmodern Nation(s)?

My dissertation addresses a question that recurs frequently in contemporary literary and cultural theories: is there a space for the nation in postmodernism¹? How can we combine such a hesitant, cynical, and anxious phenomenon as postmodernism with the apparently self-confident political category of the nation? Since postmodernism contests the idea of essence and questions the vision of the kind of collective consciousness which is the basis of imagining nations, the two discourses appear to be incompatible. The national principle, by its very nature, goes against postmodernism, since it is anything but “hesitant” and “doubtful”: national struggles, which have been drawing and redrawing the map of the world for centuries, still take place, and their very presence seems to cast such categories as postmodernism aside as minor, frivolous, theoretical issues.

Despite the large number of books written both on postmodernism and nationalism, few critics address the paradox involved in the idea of “postmodern nations.” Postcolonial criticism, for instance, investigates the issue from various perspectives, since after the decolonisation of the Third World the formation of independent nations has become a central focus of analysis in a number of historical and literary writings. However, as Benita Parry, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and many other postcolonial scholars claim, the term “postcolonialism” seems to be even more problematic than “postmodernism” as regards the manifold approaches, ideas, and possibilities that it designates,² which means that postcolonial criticism as such does not have a unanimous standpoint as regards the importance of nation(hood) either. Radical “nationalists,” for instance, mostly coming from African

¹ For my understanding of postmodernism see page 4.

² As Parry writes, “within the multiplicity of literary and cultural studies now identified as constituting ‘postcolonial criticism,’ there is a constant slippage between significations of an historical transition, a cultural location, a discursive stance, and an epochal condition” (3).

nations, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, defend the notion of local national communities and local languages, while critics such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha investigate the idea of nation in a profoundly postmodern framework. As Parry puts it, the "location" occupied by this second approach "has been glossed by Gyan Prakash as 'neither inside nor outside the history of western domination but in a tangential relation to it,' the double or semi-detached consciousness facilitating an understanding of colonialism and its legacies different from the narratives handed down by both colonialism and anti-colonial movements" (4). It is this position that interests me, since, unlike radical anti-colonial critics, those who claim that they occupy a "third space" neither inside nor outside western domination also attempt to resolve, or, at least, address, the paradox of postmodernism *and* nationhood.

Critics involved in gender studies have also been addressing the issue of nationhood in the past few decades. We have witnessed a proliferation of books and articles investigating the intersections of gender and nation: Anne McClintock, Cynthia Enloe, Elleke Boehmer, Nira Yuval-Davies, Floya Anthias, Joane Nagel, Inderpal Grewal, among others, have criticised Western, male-dominated theoretical paradigms, including Benedict Anderson's and Ernest Gellner's, from a gender-conscious perspective. These studies are built upon the assumption of Boehmer and McClintock who claim that "[w]omen are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency" (McClintock 354), and investigate the discrepancies between this idealised symbolic position and the particular situations of women in various national communities. A number of these writings spring from a cultural and sociological context that shares some affinities with postcolonial studies; after the dissolution of multi-national states, such as the former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, newly independent nations face the need to rewrite their histories, and some of these accounts also address the question of gender, similarly to

postcolonial writings. However, these works are more interested in particular case studies than general theories, and, in my view, despite their harsh criticism, do not really rewrite Anderson's and Gellner's arguments.

In my dissertation I also take gender into account, as well as the findings of postcolonial theories, yet unlike most scholars in these disciplines, what I am primarily interested in is not a case study, but a theoretical question: I investigate the apparently inconceivable intersections of postmodernism and nationhood, the very possibility (or impossibility) of such an intersection, and the engendering of these categories. I claim that despite their paradoxical nature, postmodern nation(s) do exist as theoretical possibilities; they do not constitute a radically new category within postmodernism, and never really manage to redefine the paradigm of the modern nation, but they recur as haunting ghosts challenging the all too easy assumption of critics who claim that nations are dead and gone in the age of post- and transnationalism.³ Derrida has claimed that the "specter" of Marx haunts postmodernism, a powerful "hallucination or simulacrum that is virtually more actual than what is so blithely called a living presence" (*Specters* 12-13); I argue that nations, just like Derrida's "specters," return in the postmodern as ghosts that inhabit the margins of this peculiarly fluid era.

When I claim that modern nations "haunt" the postmodern age, I rely on theories that regard postmodernism as a political as well as historical phenomenon, as opposed to those arguments that consider it a "futile game", a theory that celebrates utter relativism. Linda Hutcheon, who defines the postmodern as "fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political" (*Poetics* 4), helps to clarify the position that I take. Hutcheon, influenced by Lyotard,⁴ Althusser,⁵ Foucault, and Terry Eagleton, among others, argues that

³ See, for instance, the writings of Arjun Appadurai and Masao Miyoshi, among others. I will discuss this argument in more detail in the first chapter.

⁴ As Lyotard argues, since postmodernism's main objective is the critical rethinking of the past, attempting to reveal the ideologies inherent in the master narratives of liberal humanism, postmodernism carries out a political

politics, ideology, and an unprecedented opportunity for the rethinking of history lie at the heart of the postmodern enterprise. The main opponents of this position, however, claim that postmodernism is characterised by cynicism and “faithlessness,” and that it simply allows no room for historical analysis, since Derrida, Foucault, and other prominent philosophers have created an anti-humanist discourse that does not only question such notions as freedom, individuality, and reality, but it also forecloses the very possibility of activism and radical politics. Among the most prominent representatives of this critical position are Donna J. Haraway,⁶ Fredric Jameson,⁷ Aijaz Ahmad⁸ and Sara Suleri,⁹ who claim that we need to return to a more “useful,” concrete, and “down to earth” politics in order to avoid the futile,

project by the very set of questions it poses. His well-known definition of the postmodern has almost become a credo in literary theory: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal” (xxiv).

⁵ Hutcheon refers to Althusser in the book that she wrote after *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, acknowledging her debt to the critic: “The conceptual grounding of such a postmodern view of the politics of representation can be found in many theories today. In fact, there exists a journal, *boundary 2*, which clearly sees theory, postmodernism, and politics as being at the very heart of its agenda. However, the single most influential theoretical statement on the topic might well be Louis Althusser’s much cited notion of ideology both as a system of representation and as a necessary and unavoidably part of every social reality” (*Politics* 6).

⁶ Haraway parodies apolitical attempts of theorising, and argues that we need a more self-conscious and articulate politics in order to become less cynical, less faithless, and more effective, more potent, more capable of taking control of our own survival. “The transcendent authorization of interpretation is lost [in postmodernism], and with it the ontology grounding ‘Western’ epistemology. But the alternative is not cynicism or faithlessness, that is, some version of abstract existence, like accounts of technological determinism destroying ‘man’ by ‘machine’ or ‘meaningful political action by the ‘text.’ Who cyborgs will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival. Both chimpanzees and artefacts have politics, so why shouldn’t we?” (153).

⁷ According to Jameson, postmodern literary theory is characterised by a profound historical deafness: “it is hard to discuss ‘postmodernism theory’ in any general way without having recourse to the matter of historical deafness, an exasperating condition (provided you are aware of it) that determines a series of spasmodic and intermittent, but desperate, attempts at recuperation (xi).” He regards postmodernism as a self-indulgent, both apolitical and ahistorical, “enchanted realm” (65), centred on “false” problems, and follows Jürgen Habermas in affirming “the supreme value of the modern” (58). According to him, the historical impulse is either “repressed” or “distorted” in postmodernism (xi). His belittling terms (“spasmodic” but “desperate attempts at recuperation”) convey a lot about his views concerning the attempts of “postmodernist theory” to incorporate historicity into its perspective. (64)

⁸ Aijaz Ahmad, the well-known Marxist critic, for instance, calls postmodernism a futile intellectual game, which is unable to solve vital social questions, such as mapping power relations in society: “[w]ithin a postmodernist intellectual milieu where texts are to be read as the utterly free, altogether hedonistic play of the signifier, I can well empathise with a theoretical operation that seeks to locate the production of texts within a determinate, knowable field of power and signification” (“Jameson’s Rhetoric” 22).

⁹ As Suleri argues, due to a profound “academic self-censorship,” critics cannot really take a political stance but deliberately misread questions of cultural criticism and identity, and instead of giving plausible answers, repeat meaningless clichés about political correctness: “The sustained and trivializing attack on what is represented as academic self-censorship cannot be segregated from current reformulations of cultural identities: the former will continue to misconstrue deliberately questions of marginality into solutions of frivolity, or cultural criticism into tyrannical clichés about the political correctness of the thought police” (“Woman Skin Deep” 757).

Derridean games that delight in questioning yet do not lead to action and radical change. It is the first approach that interests me, since, even though I sympathise with the aspirations of politically-minded critics, those discourses often bring back the modern idea of politics and nation, without any real attempt at redefining and relocating it.¹⁰ Whereas critics who insist on re-politicising the postmodern cannot avoid returning to a semi-didactic language, presupposing a “genuine concept of historicity,” for instance, as Jameson does, those who read the postmodern as a “resolutely historical” age attempt to find historical and political impulses within its own parameters. In other words, whereas the second approach prefers a pedagogical/didactic language, to use Homi Bhabha’s terms, the first is more interested in performative gestures, since the historical and political impulses within the postmodern can only surface as resistant, performative attempts that question the very framework that contains them. When Hutcheon, for instance, defines “historiographic metafiction” as a new postmodern genre that is “both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay[s] claim to historical events and personages” (*Poetics* 5), characterized by the desire to be “accurately” historical as well as by the “theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs” (*Poetics* 5), she foregrounds precisely that ambiguous dimension of the postmodern which is also the space of the nation in Rushdie’s works.

Before reading Rushdie’s novels, I will briefly examine the discourse of nationalism studies, with the primary aim of establishing what the *modern nation* is. Understanding the structure of the modern nation is indispensable for my analysis, since it is precisely this category that returns to haunt the postmodern. In the following three chapters I read three novels by Salman Rushdie: *Midnight’s Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses*. These texts were written by a postcolonial writer, born in India, yet many critics claim that his novels are schoolbook examples of postmodern texts as regards their writing techniques and treatment of

¹⁰ Except for Haraway, who argues for a profoundly postmodern yet empowered female subjectivity (173-181).

culture, nation, identity, and so on. Timothy Brennan, for instance, groups Rushdie among “cosmopolitan writers,” along with V. S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee, Carlos Fuentes, and Vargas Llosa, claiming that his attitude towards the project of national culture is “parodic,” and that there is a “declaration of cultural ‘hybridity’” (35) in his writings.¹¹ It is easy to notice that this argument mobilises the catch phrases of postmodern theories (parody, hybridity, collision, and so on), suggesting that the novels of these writers are located at the intersection of the postcolonial and the postmodern. In Rushdie’s texts, there is an explicit desire to “cross-pollinate” both categories¹²; as he writes in one of his essays, “Imaginary Homelands,” “Indian writers in these islands, like others who have migrated into the north from the south, are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society” (19). It is this ambivalent in-between space that interests me, since it acts as the most fertile ground for the analysis of “postmodern nations”. As Homi Bhabha puts it, “‘national’ cultures are being produced from the perspective of disenfranchised minorities” (6), and though his argument primarily concerns the rewriting of Western national cultures by minority groups, in my view, this “location” also acts as a productive space for the rethinking of the discourse of the modern nation and its legacies per se, without necessarily intending to “dismantle” Western cultures and authorizing the “avenging” migrant to perform this task.¹³

I do not read Rushdie’s novels as case studies of India and Pakistan; I argue that his texts shed light on how the category of the nation is reinserted into a largely “hostile,” postmodern framework. The nations in his novels are split between a didactic-pedagogical

¹¹ “[Cosmopolitan writers] seem to share a harsh questioning of radical decolonisation theory; a dismissive or parodic attitude towards the project of national culture; a manipulation of imperial imagery and local legend as a means of politicising ‘current events’; and a declaration of cultural ‘hybridity’ – a hybridity claimed to offer certain advantages in negotiating the collisions of language, race and art in a world of disparate peoples comprising a single, if not exactly unified, world” (35).

¹² This is Rushdie’s own metaphor; he writes about “cross-pollination” and “cultural transplantation” when he describes the hybrid position that international and migrant writers occupy („Imaginary Homelands” 20).

¹³ Obviously, the space between the postcolonial and the postmodern is not the only location that the postmodern nation inhabits; there are a number of novels by British writers that also problematise these issues (Julian Barnes’s and Jeanette Winterson’s works, among others).

and a postmodern-performative pole, to use Homi Bhabha's terms, who argues that a nation's people must be thought in "double-time": first, as objects of a national pedagogy, and second, as subjects of signification, as living, performative principles, who intervene into this very pedagogy (145). This split creates a constant tension in Rushdie's texts: performative images haunt pedagogical constructions, posing a challenge both to didactic national(ist) ideologies and to those critics who claim that nations are dead and gone in the postmodern. Therefore, I claim that these nations are not simply the awkward leftovers of modernity, or the traces of the writer's postcolonial origin in conflict with the postmodern framework of his texts; Rushdie's postmodern nations attempt to (re)insert a hopeful and optimistic vision into a hostile, postmodern framework, and, in this way, pose a challenge to postmodernism itself.

I. Theorising the Nation

For students of literature, the terminology of nationalism studies sounds rather confusing, since in this discourse “modernism” is used as the synonym of “modernity”: unaffected by the literary and artistic movement called “modernism” at the beginning of the twentieth century, historians are only concerned with “modernity” as a historical age, starting with the 18th century, and make no distinction between these terms. When historians such as Ernest Gellner, Tom Nairn, or Elie Kedourie claim that their position is “modernist,” this simply means that they believe that nations are the products of modernity, rather than ahistorical, timeless categories that have been part of human consciousness since time immemorial.

This standpoint is widely accepted in nationalism studies; most historians agree that nations are products of the modern age. There are, however, rather few attempts at *redefining* the nation after modernity, partly because few historians believe that the modern age is dead and gone, and tend to regard postmodernity as a “corrosive” fashion,¹⁴ and partly because those critics who theorise the postmodern claim that it is incompatible with such atavistic categories as the nation. There seems to be no real interaction between these positions; the very term becomes a nuisance for most critics who theorise the postmodern, an atavistic occurrence in a global age, an out-of-date residue that we need to leave behind. Therefore, critics tend to talk about post- and transnationalism, like Arjun Appadurai, for instance, who claims that “[w]e need to think ourselves beyond the nation [and recognize] postnational social forms” (411), or Masao Miyoshi, who argues that the territorial form of the nation state no longer determines the operation of power today, since “colonialism is even more active

¹⁴ Anthony D. Smith claims that postmodern approaches are simply “corrosive” to established orthodoxies: “the old models have been discarded along with much of the older paradigm of nationalism in which they were embedded. Moving beyond the older paradigm, new ideas, methods and approaches, hardly amounting to an alternative paradigm, yet corrosive of the established orthodoxies, have called into question the very idea of the unitary nation, revealing its fictive bases in the narratives of its purveyors. The deconstruction of the nation foreshadows the demise of the theory of nationalism” (*Nationalism and Modernism* 3). Gellner is even more radical in his criticism: in *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* he writes that “[p]ostmodernism is a contemporary movement. It is strong and fashionable. Over and above this, it is not altogether clear what the devil it is. In fact, clarity is not conspicuous among its marked attributes” (22).

now in the form of transnational corporations” (728). The new power relations, or, the new “Empire”, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri claim, is characterised by the lack of boundaries: it is a “regime that effectively encompasses the spatial totality, or really that rules over the entire ‘civilized’ world. No territorial boundaries limit its reign” (xiv). These critics register the “transition from the sovereign right of nation-states [. . .] to the first postmodern global figures of imperial right” (4), and the territorial nation state becomes a secondary if not altogether useless category in this fluid world. This position, however, fails to take into account the haunting vision of the nation in the postmodern, which, in my view, suggests that despite the appearance of post- and transnational social formations, the nation retains a significant space in postmodernity, and not only as an ideology, but rather as an insistent psychological and social phenomenon.

Except for the interventions of Homi Bhabha, hardly any critic engages in analysing the modern canon of nationalism studies from a postmodern perspective. In my view, we need to investigate this canon not only because it provides “proper” theories and “proper” definitions of the nation, but also because through these modernist theories we can get a glimpse of that profoundly modern nation which reappears in postmodern texts, though often in almost unrecognizable, metamorphosed shapes. Postmodernism does not invent its own ambiguous nations; the nations that we find on the margins of Rushdie’s texts are akin to the modern nation to a great extent, only their possibilities and very beings are more delimited.

In this chapter I shall start with a brief examination of the modern discourse of nationalism studies, or, more precisely, the rhetoric of this discourse, as well as the “genealogy” of the “postmodern nation,” focusing on how modernist theories opened the way towards postmodern theorising. Then I shall move on to investigate the very nature of “modernity” as it is imagined by historians as well as philosophers, such as Walter Benjamin, since in order to understand the “trespassing” that the postmodern nation performs, first we

have to understand the structure of the *modern* nation. In this section, I focus on the Janus-faced nature of the modern nation that strangely echoes the paradoxical split at the heart of modernity itself, as it is defined by Benjamin, who famously argued that modernity is both a drastic break from the past as well as its continuous renewal. In my view, the nation does not enact these paradoxical impulses by mere chance: split between a “progressive” masculine and a “regressive” feminine “face,” the modern nation evokes an originary fantasy, an undivided, androgynous totality, as well the tearing apart of this very ideal by instituting these poles as binary opposites. Therefore, though the nation appears to be a profoundly rational entity, the apotheosis of the ideals of modernity, this haunting vision renders it illusory as well as irrational. In the third part of this chapter, and in the rest of my dissertation, I shall argue that the androgynous fantasy haunting the modern nation remains a recurring vision in the postmodern as well: even the binary oppositions return, though instead of imagining a “progressive” and a “regressive” pole, Homi Bhabha’s writings and Rushdie’s novels transform the “progressive” into a miraculous yet hesitant category posited against a “regressive,” pedagogical, official version of nationhood.

The Nation’s Modernity

The best known advocate of the nation’s modernity is Ernest Gellner, whose views have become an “orthodoxy” by now in nationalism studies: he was the first to claim that the nation, even though it appears to be essential and timeless, an entity that “has always been with us,” was born in the 18th century, in the age of the Enlightenment. He already advocated this view in the sixties,¹⁵ and then published a more elaborate version in 1983, in his book

¹⁵ In his book entitled *Thought and Change*, published in 1964.

entitled *Nations and Nationalism*.¹⁶ This year was indeed an annus mirabilis in nationalism studies; besides Gellner's book, two other important works appeared: Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, and *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Both relying on Gellner and questioning his theories, all of these historians take the nation's modernity for granted, and further elaborate on its imaginary or invented aspects.¹⁷

The strongest point that Gellner makes is that ethnicity, popular culture, and the "collective will" of a people are not enough for the formation of nations. According to him, the birth of the centralized state during the industrial revolution, together with its bureaucratic machinery, as well as mass education and the emergence of a new literary elite, led to the formation of modern nations at the end of the 18th century. The nature of this "formation" is, of course, the crucial point, since it raises several questions as regards the origins of nations: to what extent are nations inventions? To what extent are they *recreations* of something that has a history longer than the past two hundred years? Gellner's position is less straightforward than it appears to be. True, he argues that there is an aspect of invention in the rhetoric of modern nationalisms: "If nationalism prospers it eliminates the alien high culture, but it does not then replace it by old local low culture; it revives, or *invents*, a local high (literate, specialist-transmitted) culture of its own, though admittedly one which will have some links with the earlier folk styles and dialects" (*Nations and Nationalism* 57, emphasis added). Gellner uses the word "invention," which has become the main target of Anderson, who claims that "Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretences that he assimilates 'invention' to 'fabrication' and 'falsity,' rather than 'imagining' and 'creation' (6). However, I think Gellner quite clearly argues that this invention is not the

¹⁶ Gellner has published several books since *Thought and Change* besides his most famous *Nations and Nationalism*. See for instance *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (1992), *Encounters with Nationalism* (1994), *Nationalism* (1997), among others.

¹⁷ See for instance the works of Gellner, Tom Nairn, Eric J. Hobsbawm, Elie Kedourie, Benedict Anderson, and so on.

conjuring trick of a magician, who creates a visible nation from hitherto nonexistent elements, but the result of a very self-conscious, though far from ideologically innocent, process of harmonizing “folk styles and dialects” with the new demands of the modern nation.

As several scholars note, the modernist paradigm was a reaction to older theories, predominant before the Second World War.¹⁸ Anachronistically, these theories are labelled “perennial,” since they consider the nation an organic, perpetual, and atavistic entity, the germs of which have been with us ever since human beings started to live in communities. As John Hutchinson claims,

[t]hey presented the past as the story of nations engaged in a perpetual process of self-realization. These nations were primordial entities embedded in human nature and history that were objectively identifiable through their distinctive way of life (e.g. through language, history, education, religion), their attachment to a territorial homeland, and their striving for political autonomy. (3)

In this discourse, the nation appears as an organic, teleological, self-fulfilling and entirely “natural” entity, and its history presupposes a linear development, untainted by the ruptures modernists will notice in nations’ apparently “flawless” trajectories.¹⁹ That is, whereas modernists claim that there is an element of “invention” in the creation of the nation, which makes its history discontinuous, according to the perennial view, the nation is an essential given which has been seamlessly developing through the centuries. These approaches seem to

¹⁸ See for instance the works of John Hutchinson (*Modern Nationalism*) and Anthony D. Smith (*Nationalism and Modernism*).

¹⁹ However, even though perennialism as such was the dominant way of understanding the nation before the Second World War, several critics still advocate a position that echoes some of its tenets as a challenge of modernist theories. According to Smith, there are two “schools” of anti-modern primordialists, claiming either that nations should be seen as extended kinship groups (Van den Berghe), or that they are entities that share essential cultural features and primordial ties, recalling the Durkheimian argument (Clifford Geertz) (146-153). Hugh Seton-Watson, a historian publishing his most influential theories in the seventies-eighties, also claims that a sense of nationality had been developing in Europe since antiquity; see his *Nations and States*.

be akin to the discourses familiar to us from cultural and gender studies, among other disciplines, which build on the opposition between “essentialism” and “constructivism,” “continuity” and discontinuity,” consistently deconstructing notions that appear to be “essential” and “continuous.”²⁰

There is, however, another group of scholars, who seem to “mediate” between these two apparently mutually exclusive alternatives: the so-called “ethnicists.” Just like perennialists, they consider ethnicity and not the changes brought by modernisation as the main catalyser that explains the birth of nations, yet they do not regard nations as “natural givens.” As Anthony D. Smith, the best known ethnicist, claims,

[t]he world does not consist of ‘natural’ nations, except thinking makes it so, nor are nations to be likened to evolving organisms; on the contrary, nations and nationality are logically and historically contingent phenomena. Before the modern epoch, nations were largely unknown, and human beings had a multiplicity of collective loyalties; religious communities, cities, empires and kingdoms were the chief collective actors, above the village and district level, and the outlook of most human beings was strictly local. (*Nationalism and Modernism* 146)

That is, Smith claims that ethnicists accept the “modernist paradigm” (“[b]efore the modern epoch, nations were largely unknown”), and he also seems to be aware of the ideology hidden in the notion of “natural” nations (“the world does not consist of ‘natural’ nations, except thinking makes it so”). His main argument against the modernists is that industrialisation, bureaucracy, and the integration of “the masses” through citizenship rights do not explain the

²⁰ Though several critics, especially in gender studies, advocate a “strategic essentialism” and claim that the uncritical acceptance of theories that argue for the socially constructed nature of femininity, ethnicity, and so on, lose the very subject of their discourse. Susan Bordo, for instance, claims that postmodernity “tames” radical interventions and challenges, and therefore, we need to be pragmatic rather than theoretically “pure” even if this pragmatism unavoidably leads to the embracing of notions that other critics would label “essentialist” (129).

emergence of national consciousness and national sentiments. As Hutchinson puts it, ethicists regard the nation as “an ethno-cultural community shaped by shared myths of origins, a sense of common history and way of life, and particular ideas of space, that endows its members with identity and purpose” (7). The metaphors that Hutchinson uses tend to be somewhat vague, leaving the most crucial points he makes unexplained (how are we to define what constitutes a “*common* way of life”? or “*particular* ideas of space”?). If we tried to situate this approach somewhere along the essentialist-constructivist line, it would seem to be closer to the essentialist pole, despite the fact that ethnicists also date nations from the time of modernity, since that unexplainable “something” which provides the secret cohesion between otherwise disjunctive elements (ways of life and ideas of space) retains a secret “magic” that constructivists would detect and attempt to unmask.

The question is, of course, where to locate the notion of the “postmodern nation” along this spectrum. Genealogically, the quasi-postmodern approach, associated with the names of Benedict Anderson (despite his very own assumptions), and later Homi K. Bhabha, has grown out of the modernist-constructivist view: the notions of construction, invention, ideology and discontinuity, which modernists partly acknowledged, partly “suggested” through the rhetoric of their discourse, have found a fertile ground in postmodern writings. Gellner, at the beginning of *Nations and Nationalism*, for instance, claims that he is not interested in what culture is, but in what it *does*, almost echoing the basic assumption of cultural studies.²¹ In other words, though the historical discourse on the nation’s modernity and that of cultural studies apparently had no common interest, since around the sixties, Ernest Gellner and other modernists have started to advocate an argument which brought the two discourses surprisingly close, and which later opened the way before postmodern

²¹ As Gellner argues, „[d]efinitions of culture [. . .], in the anthropological rather than the normative sense, are notoriously difficult and unsatisfactory. It is probably best to approach this problem by using this term without attempting too much in the way of formal definition, and looking at what culture *does*” (*Nations and Nationalism* 7).

theorising, despite the very label *modernists* have appropriated for their position. Benedict Anderson's well known *Imagined Communities*, the book that has finally opened the dialogue between modernist approaches and postmodern interpretations, as well as between nationalism studies and literary theory, acts as a border guard in this process: a paradigmatic work indeed, *Imagined Communities* literally begins as a modernist argument but terminates in an insight that has profoundly postmodern overtones and repercussions. It is worth looking at the peculiar nature of Gellner's modernity more closely, then, as well as at Anderson's ambivalent work, which will help us understand both the affinities between the modernist and the postmodernist positions and the trespassing that the "postmodern nation" performs.

Faces of Modernity

In Gellner's terminology, in line with the Marxist legacy and use of the term, "the modern" basically refers to *modernisation* and the changes brought by the industrial revolutions in the 18th and 19th centuries. Unlike Gellner, Smith, or Hutchinson, who do not distinguish between modernity and modernism, since modernism as an artistic movement does not affect their discourse, literary critics find it difficult to define these categories, and quite often refer to the manifold, obscure nature of both terms. As Rita Felski claims, for instance,

[e]ven the most cursory survey of the vast body of writing about the modern reveals a cacophony of different and often dissenting voices. Modernity arises out of a culture of 'stability, coherence, discipline and worldmastery' [Bryan S. Turner]; alternatively it points to a 'discontinuous experience of time, space and causality as transitory, fleeting and fortuitous [David Frisby].' For some writers it is a 'culture of rupture,'

marked by historical relativism and ambiguity [Matei Calinescu]; for others it involves a ‘rational, autonomous subject’ and an ‘absolutist, unitary conception of truth’ [Susan J. Hekman]. (11)

Felski later makes a distinction between modernity, modernisation, modernism, and modernité, which clarifies the deliberate confusion she portrays in the passage above,²² and though she is quite suspicious about “universal” theorising, which attempts to order the “multidimensional” nature of historical modernity into a “unified Zeitgeist,” [15]²³ she ends up with the following, quite categorical, definition: “modernity is often used as an overarching periodizing term,” which “typically includes a general philosophical distinction between traditional societies, which are structured around the omnipresence of divine authority, and a modern secularized universe predicated upon an individuated and self-conscious subjectivity” (13). In other words, the loss of omnipresence and divine authority, secularization and rational, self-conscious subjectivity manifested in the notion of the semi-omnipotent individual are key features of the “literary/philosophical” version of modernity, which is almost synonymous with the Enlightenment, as Felski herself remarks.

Modernist historians are obviously less concerned with the kind of subjectivity Felski refers to, and rather focus on another aspect of the modern age: bureaucratic and capitalist domination, which also acts as a defining feature of the period. Still, there are quite a few traits in Gellner’s theory that overlap with Felski’s notion of modernity.²⁴ The autonomous

²² It will become clear for the reader that the main paradox she parodies lies in the tension between modernity (and modernisation), and modernism (and modernité): to put it very simply, whereas stability, coherence, and the notion of the autonomous subject characterise the first pair, the discontinuous experience of time, historical relativism and ambiguity are the primary attributes of the second.

²³ As Felski argues, “[r]ather than identifying a stable referent or set of attributes, ‘modern’ acts as a mobile and shifting category of classification that serves to structure, legitimize, and valorize varied and often competing perspectives. My analysis thus begins with the assumption that modernity embraces a multidimensional array of historical phenomena that cannot be prematurely synthesized into a unified Zeitgeist” (14-15).

²⁴ In another book, titled *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, Gellner articulates his modernist position more self-consciously, and it becomes obvious for the reader that he situates himself and his theories *against* postmodern approaches, which he makes his best to ridicule and humiliate: “Postmodernism is a contemporary

individual and “self-determination” are recurring notions that most modernist historians appropriate, in various senses, when they refer to self-conscious citizens of the nation, the nation’s right to self-determination, and so on, all directly related to how they perceive the role of the French Revolution in creating the model of “the” modern nation and its citizens. Individual, citizen, and rationality are all recurring phrases in their arguments: as Hutchinson claims, for instance, modernity transforms “passive subjects” into “active citizens,” thus creating a self-conscious subject of the nation;²⁵ or, as Gellner remarks, drawing a parallel between Kantian self-determination and the self-determination practiced in the formation of nations, “[b]oth are [. . .] ‘rationalists,’ seeking the bases of legitimacy in something beyond that which merely *is*” (*Nations and Nationalism* 133). Perhaps the work of Elie Kedourie is the clearest example that shows how the philosophy of the Enlightenment “supports” the discourse of the nation’s modernity: according to Kedourie, the ideology that contributed to the formation of nations was directly influenced by Kantian philosophy; as he argues, nationalism is itself “largely a doctrine of national self-determination” (23), and the will of the individual seamlessly fits into this collective picture, since “[i]t is only when he and the state are one that the individual realizes his freedom” (30).

In other words, modernist discourses reproduce the notion of the self-conscious, autonomous individual, as the subject of a modern master narrative centred around the birth of the nation. This individual, just like the nations he becomes part of, appears to be highly rational, masculine, European, optimistic and quite inventive, especially in Gellner’s version. That is, the modernity of these discourses does not only consist in the claim that *modernisation* induces bureaucratic and capitalist domination, “inviting” the masses into the nation, but the very rhetoric of these texts reproduces traces of modernity, as it is defined by

movement. It is strong and fashionable. Over and above this, it is not altogether clear what the devil it is. In fact, clarity is not conspicuous among its marked attributes” (22).

²⁵ “Many historians date the rise of nations to the time of the French Revolution which, in supplanting dynastic loyalties with the idea of popular sovereignty, transformed passive subject into active, self-governing citizens” (Hutchinson 1).

Lyotard, Habermas, and Felski, among others. The most obvious features of modernity seem to recur in historical discourses which imagine the nation as a teleological, forward looking, progressive entity, despite the discontinuities in its history. As Gellner remarks, for instance, “[i]ndustrial society is the only society ever to live by and rely on sustained and perpetual growth, on an expected and continuous improvement” (*Nations and Nationalism* 22); no wonder that the nation, which is also defined by the desire for continuous improvement, has come to life in this period. Its birth and “adolescence” are defined by European models, just like the (his)story of modernity itself, and both “invade” the rest of the world later, as “gifts” of the colonisers. As Hutchinson claims, for instance, “[t]he success of the French republic as the first nation-state made it a model for other political communities in Europe and Latin America” (1). In the first version of *Imagined Communities* Anderson also argues that official nationalism in Asia and Africa was modelled on the dynastic states of 19th-century Europe, making several postcolonial critics (such as Ania Loomba and Partha Chatterjee) ask impatiently whether he intends to colonise even the national imaginary of the postcolonial world.²⁶ The most notoriously Eurocentric theory is, however, the argument of E. J. Hobsbawm, who defines three possible modes of “anti-imperial movements,” all of them directly related to European models, or attributed to the “*natural* high spirit” of aboriginal tribes. As he claims,

[v]irtually all the anti-imperial movements of any significance could be, and in the metropolises generally were, classified under one of three headings: local educated elites imitating European ‘national self-determination’ (as in India), popular anti-

²⁶ See Partha Chatterjee’s *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, especially chapter 1, “Whose Imagines Community?” and Ania Loomba’s *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. Anderson, however, modified his thesis in the second version of *Imagined Communities*, published in 1991, 8 years after the first edition, claiming that criticism has persuaded him to trace the genealogy of the colonial state to the imaginings of the very nations in question. See chapter 10, “Census, Map, Museum” in the second edition of *Imagined Communities*.

western xenophobia (an all-purpose heading widely applied, notably in China), and the natural high spirits of martial tribes (as in Morocco or the Arabian deserts). (*Nations and Nationalism* 151)

All of these passages suggest that the nation provides perhaps the best example of modernity's teleological, masculine, and Eurocentric master narratives. While these discourses advocate the omnipresent power of the autonomous individual, paradoxically, they erase other subjectivities, most notoriously, the female, and produce a discourse of "missing subjects," almost literally. Anderson, for instance, defines the nation as an "imagined community," leaving one to wonder about the very subject implicated by the passive voice in his definition: *who* imagines the community he talks about? Who are the subjects of the modernist discourse, hiding behind the notion of the autonomous, semi-omnipotent individual, capable of inventing and imagining the nation, as a Cartesian, genderless, "universal" and communal Cogito?

Besides being a subjectless and Eurocentric discourse, these texts also suggest that nationalism studies shares a peculiar affinity with the more ambivalent aspects of modernity. It is Walter Benjamin who elaborated on this issue, especially on modernity's paradoxical concept of time: in most of his writings on history and modernity (*Illuminations*, *The Arcade Project*, and so on) he returns to the ambivalent relationship between modernity, "the modern," and the ancient, the outmoded, the primitive. His theory influenced nationalism studies as well, though, unsurprisingly, in a somewhat superficial way: Tom Nairn and Benedict Anderson appropriate his argument, especially his famous allegorical vision of history as an angel, the ninth thesis in this "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (*Illuminations*), which has become a recurring motif in nationalism studies. Both Anderson and Nairn quote Benjamin's allegorical vision of history:

There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. An angel is depicted there who looks as though he were about to distance himself from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in from of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin, also quoted in Nairn 359-360 and in Anderson 162).

As Nairn claims, Benjamin's ninth thesis has become "the single most extraordinary image" (359) of the Frankfurt's School's world-view, with its emphasis on the dialectics of progress and tradition, or, more precisely, a forward-thrusting progressive and a backward-facing redeeming, messianic impulse that interact in the formation of history. According to O. K. Werckmeister, this insight has become "a venue for drawing out a string of fundamental contradictions between revolution and religion, activism and resignation, political partisanship and historical detachment" (242), since it has been read (and misread) in a number of different contexts.²⁷ In other words, Benjamin's allegorical image encapsulates various paradoxical

²⁷ In Werckmeister's view, "[t]he angel of history has become a symbolic figure for the contradiction-laden alignment of life, art, and politics to which left-wing intellectuals tended to aspire, an alignment that in turn fascinates left-wing academics analyzing such aspirations. It embodies the political and conceptual short-circuit between "modern" culture and revolutionary rhetoric encapsulated by the catchword *avant-garde*" (242). This article also warns against detaching Benjamin's thesis from its original historical significance and Benjamin's own situation in 1940, and notes that most interpreters generalised his vision and "understood the angel's flight over the landscape of unfolding catastrophes as a straightforward allegory of historical experience per se" (243).

impulses at the heart of modernity, depending on what kind of paradox the historian or literary critic is in search of.

In Nairn's reading, the angel sheds light on the ambivalent aspects of the Janus-faced modern nation. As he claims, there is a tension between the very language of nationalism and its primarily materialistic nature: the nation, though it is a rational and materialistic entity, needs to develop a romantic language in order to address and invite the "masses" into history; a language that they also speak, understand, and are able to identify with. As he argues, the nation "had to function through highly rhetorical forms, through a sentimental culture sufficiently accessible to the lower strata now being called to battle. This is why a romantic culture quite remote from Enlightenment rationalism always went hand in hand with the spread of nationalism" (340). In other words, Nairn perceives a split between the nation as a rational enterprise and the romantic (atavistic) rhetoric through which it becomes visualised for the "masses," and it is this very same split that opens up between the future-oriented, teleological project of modernity (i.e., the nation as the apotheosis of progress and development) and its continuous return to (and renewal of) the past.

Nairn refers to Benjamin's allegory when he envisages the spread of nationalism around the world, and this is the context in which Anderson mentions "the angel of history" as well. According to Nairn, nations and nationalism spread around the world as part of the "west-wind of progress": "the storm has blown into the most remote areas of the world. Beyond the wreckage it has aroused the great counter-force of anti-imperialist struggle" (360). This vision suggests that Nairn envisages the spread of nationalism as a "progressive" storm that destroys "the outmoded" in The Third World, in a profoundly Eurocentric way; the paradox for him seems to lie in the fact that this "storm" created "wreckage" and backfired on Western colonialism, since it arose the national consciousness of colonised countries and led to the formation of independent nations in the Third World as well. Anderson's argument is

quite similar: in the chapter titled “The Angel of History” he argues that revolution and nationalism, which are “originally” Western inventions, became available for “pirating” (156) and led to local nationalisms in the Third World directed against the “official nationalisms” of the West. Anderson does not really explain why he quotes Benjamin at the end of this chapter, so it is not entirely clear how he understands his paradox. Perhaps it is manifested in the tension between the “official nationalisms” of Western Empires, which are nationalisms of the state, and the revolutionary popular nationalisms of the Third World. His argument is quite similar to that of Nairn, except that he creates a binary opposition between “unofficial” Third World resistance and the “official” nationalism of Western Empires.²⁸ In both discourses the paradoxical split is located around the ambivalent, both “progressive” and “regressive” nature of nationalism.

Both in Nairn and in Anderson, the angel of history becomes associated with the historian in a rather curious way: for Nairn, the historian literally becomes identical with the backward-looking angel:

Like everyone else my back is turned to the future, and like most others I am chiefly conscious of the debris reaching skywards. However, there is no point in fabricating new totems for history to hurl in front of our feet after desacralizing the old ones. This is not a pessimistic stance, though I suppose there is a degree of wilful disenchantment

²⁸ This argument is, however, quite debatable. First, how are we to distinguish “official” and “unofficial” nationalisms? Is there a type of nationalism that seems to be “uncontaminated” by the ideologies of the state? Perhaps it is only Anderson’s terminology that is problematic, not his attempt to differentiate types of nationalisms in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and in Third World countries is, yet the binary opposition he institutes is not an adequate means for mapping this diversity. Furthermore, as I have mentioned earlier, Anderson has been criticised for proposing that the nationalisms of the Third World were modelled on, and were reactions to, western official nationalisms (and this criticism made him rethink the argument he proposed in this chapter, yet it was never omitted from the revised edition of *Imagined Communities*). As Partha Chatterjee writes: “I have one central objection to Anderson’s argument. If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain ‘modular’ forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what are they left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized” (5).

about it: I would like to believe that it is more than being compelled at last to face with sober senses our real conditions of life, and our real relations with our kind. (362)

Nairn attempts to overcome Benjamin's "pessimistic stance" when he articulates his final belief that the historian is able to face "our real conditions of life" and "our real relations with our kind" in quite an assertive way. This is the final affirmative image of his chapter entitled "The Modern Janus," the concluding chapter of his book. Similarly, Anderson quotes Benjamin on the last page of "The Angel of History." Instead of interpreting the image, however, he simply leaves the reader with a somewhat enigmatic note: "But the Angel is immortal, and our faces are turned towards the obscurity ahead" (162). It is obvious that his collective pronoun ("our faces") refers both to the historian and to people in general (unsurprisingly, the collective, universal, and passive individual of *imagined* communities returns here); by making it "immortal," perhaps he suggests that Benjamin's angel, just like nationalism, is still with us, despite Marxism and internationalism (this is the main argument of his book). Making the angel face the future, however, even though a future that is "obscure," he transforms Benjamin's schizoid vision into an affirmative image, just like Nairn, though whereas Nairn reintroduces an unproblematic notion of "reality," Anderson's affirmative gesture lies in his vision of progress: the angel, with his face turned towards the obscure future, becomes the messiah sent on the mission to understand the apparently incomprehensible resurgence of nationalisms all around the world.

In both Nairn and Anderson, then, Benjamin's ambiguous and paradoxical vision is transformed into an affirmative image; a positive vision of reassurance and hope. In my view, this is also what happens when Anderson interprets Benjamin's temporality. As he argues, in the 18th century "a fundamental change was taking place in modes of apprehending the world, which, more than anything else, made it possible to 'think' the nation" (22). This fundamental

change is, in his interpretation, the transformation from the “Messianic time” of the Middle Ages to the “homogeneous empty time” of modernity. For Anderson, this seems to be a rather simple shift; as he writes, the time of the Middle Ages was marked by the idea of “simultaneity,” “a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present” (24), whereas in modernity simultaneity becomes “transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar” (24). According to Anderson, this transformation provided the basic change in the modern age that made it possible to conceptualise the nation as an imagined community.

However, Benjamin’s temporality is more complex than Anderson presumes. John D. Kelly, who discusses Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* from a transnational perspective, refers to some of these misunderstandings: as he argues, whereas historical “analysis” for Benjamin meant seizing “hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger,” and not articulating and recognizing the past “the way it really was,”²⁹ for Anderson, history is transformed into a progressive “development” of nationalism all around the world. Kelly’s main point is that whereas Anderson accepted the reality of Benjamin’s chronotope, for Benjamin, “homogeneous empty time” refers exactly to that “reality” of history that has to be refused (846).³⁰ Kelly quotes Benjamin’s famous definition of historical time, which caught the attention of Jürgen Habermas as well; this passage makes Anderson’s misunderstanding crystal clear:

History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now. [*Jetztzeit*]. Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome

²⁹ “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (Benjamin)

³⁰ “In particular, to state my own thesis, Anderson’s theory of the peculiarity of the nation as an ‘imagined community’ depends upon his use of Benjamin’s image of ‘homogeneous empty time’ (1968: 261, 264); but Anderson insists upon acceptance of the reality of this chronotope, which to Benjamin was precisely the image of history that had to be refused” (Kelly 846).

was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome incarnate. It evoked ancient Rome the way fashion evokes costumes of the past. (Benjamin, also quoted in Kelly, 848 and Habermas 10).

As Kelly notes, for Benjamin, “the idea of living in homogeneous, empty time, is pathetic, and the agents promoting it were evil” (848), and instead of the Andersonian vision of “slow progress and deep horizontal symmetries” Benjamin offers “an image of intellectually fostered, but class-based, anti-evolutionary Messianic moments” (849). In other words, Kelly argues that instead of the dubious, paradoxical temporality of Benjamin, defined by traumatic danger, Messianic moments, and various differences based on class, among other factors, in *Imagined Communities* we find a progressive and symmetrical vision of time.³¹

What becomes obvious here is that Benjamin has never claimed that homogeneous empty time is the time of modernity, as opposed to the Messianic time of the Middle Ages. For Benjamin, in modernity, these temporalities seem to intermingle, and perhaps it is this intermingling that is the most obscure part of his theory of history and temporality. As he argues, a historian should establish “a conception of the present as the ‘time of the now’ which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.” This rather obscure “thesis” suggests that the present moment, which is the time of modernity, and not that of the Middle Ages, is both fragmented (since it is “shot through with chips”) and Messianic (since these “chips” seem to “contain” Messianic time). It is not entirely clear whether this is the result of how we

³¹ I agree with Kelly’s argument, yet it is important to mention that Anderson has rethought his concept of time and history in the second version of *Imagined Communities*; in the last two chapters, which were added to his book in 1991, he conceptualizes history as a traumatic narrative and claims that we have to take account of “collective amnesias” if we want to understand the past (204). This argument is closer to Benjamin’s vision of history, yet, as I argue in this chapter, Anderson’s new insight makes his book incoherent, since he does not resolve the tension that the last two chapters create with the very thesis of his book.

interpret the past,³² or of the fact that the Messiah might redeem us in the future,³³ but one thing is obvious: in Benjamin's theory, the time of modernity is neither linear, nor is it opposed to a Messianic notion of time, as Anderson presumes.

Habermas's and Susan Buck-Morss' reading of Benjamin will be of great help here, since they attempt to entangle the paradoxical relationship between the present, the historical past and the Messianic future in Benjamin's philosophy. In Habermas' view, for Benjamin, the present moment makes "homogeneous empty time" "inhomogeneous," since his notion of "now-time" suggests that "the authentic moment of an innovative present interrupts the continuum of history and breaks away from its homogeneous flow" (10). To put it very simply, the present moment disturbs the continuous flow of history in Benjamin's philosophy, and, just as Foucault argues, this act makes time and history discontinuous.³⁴ In Habermas' reading, the present is both future-oriented and displays a "yet more radical orientation toward the past" (12): "Inasmuch as we appropriate past experiences with an orientation to the future, the authentic present is preserved as the locus of continuing tradition and innovation at once" (13). The temporality of modernity is not linear and logical, but repetitive and *split*, and it is radically different from the progressive and teleological view that Anderson outlines in the first chapters of *Imagined Communities*. This gesture strips modernity of radical novelty, and

³² The quotation above is the conclusion of a passage that elaborates on how we interpret the past: "Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the "time of the now" which is shot through with chips of Messianic time" (Benjamin).

³³ In another passage, however, Benjamin draws a strong parallel between the future and the coming of the Messiah: "The soothsayers who found out from time what it had in store certainly did not experience time as either homogeneous or empty. Anyone who keeps this in mind will perhaps get an idea of how past times were experienced in remembrance--namely, in just the same way. We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogeneous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which Messiah might enter."

³⁴ See Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*.

renders it both a drastic break with the past and, paradoxically, the constant return of premodernity. Benjamin's 14th thesis, partly quoted above, clearly supports this point:

History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now. [*Jetztzeit*].* Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome incarnate. It evoked ancient Rome the way fashion evokes costumes of the past. Fashion has a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is a tiger's leap into the past. This jump, however, takes place in an arena where the ruling class give the commands. The same leap in the open air of history is the dialectical one, which is how Marx understood the revolution. (The last four sentences are also quoted in Habermas [10]).

The present is the "reincarnation" of the past; it "evokes" selected events in order to justify its own needs. This "thesis," which has become one of the most crucial insights of hermeneutics, does not only suggest that we interpret the past with present needs in our minds, but it also implies that the present moment is the repetition and reincarnation of selected past events ("The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome incarnate"). This insight seriously challenges the assumption that the time of modernity is progressive, and it proposes a more fragmentary and traumatic vision; a present marked by reincarnation and evocation.

Susan Buck-Morss' reading of Benjamin's unfinished and largely neglected *The Arcade Project*³⁵ makes this assumption even more explicit. As she claims, in Benjamin's philosophy, modernity has a secret desire to restore the past: this is evident in the "forms

³⁵ Buck-Morss claims that this unfinished and obscure "literary effort," which is not even a "work," but research notes and commentaries collected in folders, "might best be described as a lexicon providing concrete images, in the form of quotations from sources on 19th century Paris, which illuminate the origins of modernity" (*Passagen* 211-212).

taken by the new technologies themselves, which imitated precisely the old forms they were destined to overcome” (*Dialectics* 111). She argues that the fusion of old and new takes place behind the mask of teleology and “progress,” as if these impulses were not contradictory, but strangely supporting each other in modernity.³⁶ In her interpretation, Benjamin envisaged innate archetypes lying at the heart of the industrial project: “old utopian desires were cathected onto the new products of industrial production” (*Passagen* 218), and “ur-symbols” were rediscovered in the most modern technological products, which led Benjamin to propose that newness under capitalism was a myth, “fetishized ‘wish-image’ of change within an unchanged system” (*Passagen* 221). Buck-Morss argues that Benjamin perceived the new as “always-the-same,” and saw industrialism (capitalism), notwithstanding its rhetoric of progress, development, and change, as nothing but a “dream-sleep” that “caused the reactivation of mythic powers” (*Passagen* 222). In her reading it becomes obvious that the time of modernity, far from being a temporality measured by “clock and calendar,” as Anderson suggests (24), enacts a complex interrelation of a mythical past and a Messianic future. In Benjamin’s philosophy, then, modernity is marked by a desire for innovation yet it unavoidably falls back upon repetition, and the presence of these paradoxical impulses creates a *split* at the very heart of the modern project.

Where does this all lead in the context of nationalism studies? I think Benjamin’s argument does not only shed light on the misunderstandings in Anderson’s book, but it also helps us understand why the modern nation developed its Janus-faced mask. The nation started to imitate the past in modernity the way Benjamin suggests, constantly splitting and

³⁶ “In this still early stage of industrial nature it is no accident that early modernity feels an affinity for the primitive and the archaic. Classical antiquity was a ‘fashion’ in the nineteenth century [. . .]; in Benjamin’s own time ‘primitivism’ was in vogue. But it must also be emphasised that Benjamin identifies only what is new in history as prehistoric. The conception is dialectical. There is no biological or ontological ‘primitiveness’ that defies historical transformation. He criticized explicitly such a contention [. . .]” (Buck-Morss, *Dialectics* 70).

³⁸ Legitimacy becomes an important question for Benjamin, since he is interested in silenced and repressed classes and people, and in events that remain unlisted as “corresponding pasts,” and therefore left out from the history that legitimates the present moment. As he writes in the 5th thesis, for instance, “every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.”

fusing in the process; this explains why it appeared in the 18th century as a radically new entity with a miraculously long history. The nation is new and modern, therefore up-to-date and “progressive,” yet it is also repetitive and “reincarnated,” due to its attempt to harmonize “folk styles and dialects,” as Gellner claims (*Nations and Nationalism* 57). Similarly to Benjamin’s argument, who maintains that legitimacy is a crucial factor in this scenario,³⁸ the long tradition that the modern nation constitutes for itself makes it respectable and legitimate.

It is not just the nation’s modernity that is at stake here but that of the very discourse of nationalism studies, which also seems to perform Benjamin’s paradoxical split, almost literally: whereas Gellner claims that the nation enacts the future-oriented, messianic impulse of modernity (at this point regardless of its desire to harmonize traditions), Smith argues that it rather acts as the manifestation of a precise *nostalgia*, a secret desire that counteracts modernization and secularization. As Smith writes, for instance, “modern conditions, notably capitalism and bureaucracy, have corroded individuality and induced powerful feelings of estrangement and homelessness” (*Ethnic Origins* 175), and this is exactly why the idea of the nation has been evoked as a certain security that counteracts the estrangement of the age: “By linking oneself to a ‘community of history and destiny,’ the individual hopes to achieve a measure of immortality which will preserve his or her person and achievement from oblivion” (*Ethnic Origins* 175). Whereas for Gellner the nation acts as the logical outcome of rational secularization, in the ethnic argument it is the manifestation of a *nostalgic impulse in modernity* which counteracts the very process of secularization, rationality, and relies on an immortal, cosmological version of individuality and community. From the perspective of the modern nation, then, Benjamin’s argument is of crucial importance, since it sheds light on the ambivalent dialectic of novelty and atavism, progressive rationality and regressive nostalgia, and this ambivalence does not only characterise the project of modernity but also the structure of the modern nation.

What is interesting is not just the fact that the nation enacts these paradoxical impulses, but also the question why. How come that the nation is able to ride on both of these antithetical currents inherent in modernity? For Nairn, the backward-looking face of Janus is, of course, not the same as the “corresponding pasts” in Benjamin’s theories; it does not even necessarily refer to a temporal notion, but evokes a certain atavistic impulse, which goes hand in hand with the “progressive” nature of nationalism, yet which, quite surprisingly, does not defy modernity, but conspicuously supports it. (At one point, Nairn refers to warfare as an “atavistic urge” (337) tied up with nationalism,⁴¹ then to the backward, “lower strata” (340) as targets of nationalistic ideology and “backward lands,” which become objects of metropolitan fantasy.⁴²) Nairn argues that this duality is the result of an extremely self-conscious and rational ideology: those in power manipulate less educated people by employing a romantic (atavistic) language that everyone understands, and this creates a split between the perfectly rational aims of nationalism and the romantic language that it uses.

Nairn is obviously right in claiming that this duality explains why the rhetoric of nationalism falls back upon romantic imagery, which is opposed to the ideal of the nation as the apotheosis of modern rationalism. However, I think there is more in this split than Nairn presumes, and we have to take a look at how the progressive and regressive aspects of the nation have become *gendered* in order to understand why the nation is prone to reproduce the

⁴¹ “In reality, the spirit of commerce and the power of money, as they invaded successive areas of the globe, would lead to the renewal of atavistic urges. They would produce as intensification of warfare. Instead of growing less significant *as* barriers, national divisions would be erected into a new dominant principle of social organization” (337).

⁴² “The metropolitan fantasy of even development had predicted a swelling, single forward march that would induct backward lands into its course; in reality, these lands found themselves compelled to attempt radical, competitive short-cuts in order to avoid being trampled over or left behind. The logistics of these short-cuts brought in factors quite absent from the universalising philosophy of Progress” (341).

split at the heart of modernity. Several feminist critics have elaborated on this issue, most famously, Rita Felski⁴³ and Anne McClintock. As McClintock claims, the progressive, forward-thrusting pole of the nation is coded as masculine, whereas the regressive, backward-looking pull is gendered as a profoundly feminine aspect:

Women are represented as the atavistic and authentic ‘body’ of national tradition (inert, backward-looking, and natural), embodying nationalism’s conservative principle of continuity. Men, by contrast, represent the progressive agent of national modernity (forward-thrusting, potent and historic), embodying nationalism’s progressive, or revolutionary principle of discontinuity. (359)

Nira Yuval-Davis also refers to the paradoxical role of women in the nation, claiming that whereas women are idealised as transcendental entities that symbolise the entire nation, they are excluded from the nation as a down to earth, political collectivity. They embody McClintock’s “conservative principle of continuity” in her theory as well, at the price of being excluded from political power:

[w]omen usually have an ambivalent position within the collectivity. On the one hand [. . .], they often symbolize the collective unity, honour and the *raison d’être* of specific national and ethnic projects, like going to war. On the other hand, however, they are often excluded from the collective ‘we’ of the body politic, and retain an object rather than a subject position. (47)

⁴³ Felski analyses the split between the role of women as private homemakers, which is a timeless and unchanging position, as opposed to the role of men as active, progressive representatives of the public sphere. See *The Gender of Modernity*.

Both McClintock and Yuval-Davis identify the ambivalent position women occupy in the nation, but while McClintock focuses on the engendering of the temporal paradox haunting modernity from Benjamin to Nairn, Yuval-Davis discusses the ambivalence inherent in the notion of women as national symbols: women act as transcendental, holy symbolic figures of the nation, yet become excluded from the more down to earth, materialistic “body politic.” The paradox Yuval-Davis writes about is the direct result of the split at the heart of modernity: by splitting the nation’s discourse into “progressive masculine” and “retrogressive feminine” poles, women, “by nature,” are cast into that backward-turning position, which is “too transcendental” to be concerned with “earthly matters.”⁴⁴

The stereotypes projected into the different poles of the temporal paradox are all too familiar: women are seen as mothers of the nation, protected by their heroic sons (like in the Hungarian classic, Géza Gárdonyi’s *Eclipse of the Crescent Moon*⁴⁵), as caretakers, wiping the chests of warriors (like in the monuments of the Korean War in Washington DC), and so on. Yet what is at stake here is not the nature of these stereotypes that are projected into the nation’s diverging poles; the main point is the very *fact* that the split at the heart of modernity becomes gendered. I argue that the masculine and the feminine aspects projected into the poles of the modern nation both evoke an androgynous totality, an originary, undivided fantasy, from which the idea of the nation is supposed to have “sprung,” and enact the tearing apart of this very ideal by instituting these poles as binary opposites. The modern nation, therefore, inherits the longing for the androgynous ideal posited by creation myths⁴⁶ as well as

⁴⁴ However, if we are not only concerned with the symbolic position of women, but investigate the effects of the politics of the Enlightenment on them (as the most obviously “rational” and “progressive” ideology), McClintock’s theories could perhaps be questioned. The Enlightenment was the first epoch that addressed the question concerning the rights of women, which suggests that there is an emancipatory impulse in modernity. I am thankful to Elissa Helms for this comment (Central European University, Department of Gender Studies).

⁴⁵ Gergely, the main character of the novel, sees the Hungarian nation as his mother, and imagines himself as her son providing protection. See Ágnes Györke, “Homéroszi eposztól a Nagy Könyvig.”

⁴⁶ As June Singer claims in *Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality*, for instance, the androgynous acts as a universal or “collective image that has existed since the remotest time” (quoted in Dalibor [7]), a primordial cosmic unity that contains all the opposites: “like the yolk and the white in an egg, they are locked together, imprisoned and immovable” (quoted in Dalibor 7-8). Then, when the androgynous unity is broken, Singer argues

Christianity,⁴⁷ yet this longing remains futile since the very birth of this discourse enacts the moment when the androgynous fantasy is shattered, when the Two become instituted as opposites. The modern nation revolves around this scenario of birth, or creation, and the moment of division, which also explains why it remains haunted by images reminiscent of the androgynous wholeness erased in this very moment.

This leads to two crucial insights: first, by imagining a progressive-masculine and an atavistic feminine face, the discourse of the modern nation becomes supported by a stereotypical imagery that does not tolerate any kind of merging, or androgyny, but institutes clear-cut boundaries. Therefore, the androgyne, this fantasy in which gender hierarchy and binary opposites might be challenged,⁴⁸ does not question hierarchical oppositions, but, on the contrary, attempts to veil and subsume them. Second, the gendering of the modern nation's "faces" serves the purpose of counteracting the threat of fragmentation that might jeopardize the nation, this all too rational entity. Though the nation is split at the very moment of its birth, the androgynous totality that it evokes attempts to remedy this, as if the act of evoking an undivided unity helped to overcome an originary fracture. Therefore, the androgyne, instead of moving the discourse of the modern nation towards more egalitarian grounds, as the term itself suggests, veils the hierarchical oppositions that are inscribed in the structure of the modern nation.

that binary oppositions start to define the conditions of existence: "[. . .] then there exist the Two, as opposites. Only when the Two have become established as separate entities can they move apart and then join together in a new way to create many and disperse them. In time, pairs of opposites tend to polarize" (quoted in Dalibor 8).

⁴⁷ As Wayne Meeks writes, for instance, "[t]he unification of opposites, and especially the opposite sexes served in early Christianity as a prime symbol of salvation." (quoted in Welch 71). J. L. Welch goes even further by claiming that "[b]aptism conferred on the new Christian a state of ritual androgyny" (71): "[. . .] the Apostle Paul declares: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek... slave nor free... male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' [. . .]" (71).

⁴⁸ The challenge of gender hierarchies posed by the androgyne is, however, quite dubious, and several critics doubt that even this apparently fluid fantasy challenges culturally instituted categories. I treat the androgyne in my dissertation as a fantasy that promises the transgressing of these codes as well as the schizoid rhetoric of the modern nation.

Towards the Postmodern

The book that has shifted the discourse of the modern nation towards postmodern dimensions is Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. Anderson literally moves beyond the modernist framework: his book starts out as a self-consciously modernist argument, yet it terminates in an insight that profoundly conflicts with its preliminary assumptions. Anderson himself regards *Imagined Communities* as a modernist venture; as he claims in the first chapter, his "point of departure is that nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind" (4), which came into being at the end of the eighteenth century. Though he questions (or perhaps misunderstands) Gellner's contention concerning the invented nature of nations, claiming that it is not "fabrication" but "imagination" and "creation" that brought nations to life,⁴⁹ his argument that the nation is a "cultural artefact" originates in a profoundly Gellnerian insight. Furthermore, the very thesis of his book, the definition of the nation, presupposes the kind of omnipresent individual that we have seen implied in the claims of Gellner and other historians before. As Anderson argues, "[i]n an anthropological spirit [. . .] I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (5-6). That is, his often quoted definition presupposes the existence of a universal, genderless, self-conscious Cogito, who is responsible for imagining the nation as a homogeneous, transcendental, and all-encompassing vision, and who is able to see the boundaries of himself and his world quite clearly. ("The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries [. . .]" [7]).

⁴⁹ "'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist.' The drawback of this formulation, however, is that Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretences that he assimilates 'invention' to 'fabrication' and 'falsity,' rather than to 'imagining' and 'creation'" (Anderson 6).

In Anderson's theory, the nation becomes a vision brought to life in the eighteenth century through the reading of novels and newspapers. As he argues, the structure of novels provides an analogy that the nation "borrows," since it presents exactly that notion of "homogeneous empty time," which he sees, erroneously, as the new temporality in modernity.⁵⁰ The collective reading of newspapers, another important factor that contributes to the imagining of nations, is defined as a ritual, a recurring act that ensures a link between members of a community: the reading is "performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion" (35). However unclear it remains what kind of role Anderson attributes to eighteenth-century novels in imagining the nation (first, it is only their structure that seems to matter, the connection the reader creates in his or her mind between characters who have never met, but then Anderson refers to the "nationalistic" content of several novels, though most of them are nineteenth-century texts from the colonial world, not related to eighteenth-century Western European fiction at all⁵¹), it seems to be obvious that, in his theory, the nation is neither an ethnic given, nor a simple ideology, but an entity that is curiously visionary and *textual* in nature. As he concludes the chapter introducing this rather incoherent yet engaging argument, "fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations" (36).

Anderson's terms and categories seem to be entirely different from those of Gellner: despite his claim that the nation is a "cultural artefact," it appears to be an imaginary, transcendental entity, quite in contrast with the Gellnerian rational nation that modernisation

⁵⁰ Anderson's misunderstanding was discussed in the previous section. "Consider first the structure of the old-fashioned novel, a structure typical not only of the masterpieces of Balzac but also of any contemporary dollar-dreadful. It is clearly a device for the presentation of simultaneity in 'homogeneous, empty time,' or a complex gloss upon the word 'meanwhile'" (25).

⁵¹ On Anderson's ambivalent treatment of novels see Jonathan Culler's article, "Anderson and the Novel."

has brought to life, as if Anderson pushed the discourse of the modern nation towards Romantic aesthetics. Even though the real subjects of his discourse are missing, similarly to Gellner's argument (who imagines the community he is talking about? How many people could read in the eighteenth century? Of which class, which gender?), the kind of universal individual he imagines instead is the exact replica of the omnipotent Romantic "seer" we encounter in Wordsworth's or Shelley's poetry, for instance. Marc Redfield also refers to the Romantic aspects of Anderson's rhetoric:

Anderson proposes to reclassify [nationalism] "with 'kinship' and 'religion' rather than with 'liberalism' or 'fascism'" [IC 5] – to understand nationalism, that is, as an expression of fundamental human needs (for continuity, for affective bonds) in an age of mechanical reproduction. Anderson thus positions nationalism at a remove from the state: its roots are different from the state's and run deeper, tapping, ultimately, into the substratum of the imagination itself. That no doubt sounds like a Romantic preoccupation, as does Anderson's interest in drawing sharp distinctions between authentic, popular nationalism and the mass-produced icons and manipulative strategizing of 'official' nationalisms. (61)

Redfield situates Anderson's position in line with the ethnic argument, which claims that the nation is a fundamental human need, as against modernity, the "age of mechanical reproduction," and finds one of the quite numerous Romantic gestures he identifies in Anderson's inclination to move the nation beyond the margins of the state. At this point, however, he seems to ignore Anderson's contention that the nation is *also* a "cultural artefact," and the fact that Anderson attempts to balance between these two extreme positions. Furthermore, by claiming that the roots of the nation "run *deeper*" than those of the state,

“tapping, ultimately, into the *substratum* of imagination itself,” Redfield positions the nation in Anderson’s discourse in the dimension of the “sub,” the “beyond,” the transcendental – another ultimately Romantic “place.” In other words, Anderson’s work seems to enact a Romantic impulse within the all too rational modernist discourse of nationalism; although it has grown out of the modernist canon, *Imagined Communities* attempts to transcend its all too predictable boundaries. What is even more important from my perspective, however, is that the postmodern nation, which Anderson’s work evokes, however unselfconsciously, was brought to life *through this “Romantic detour”*. This suggests that there is a further affinity between the metaphysics of Romanticism and the hiding space of the nation in postmodernism.

Imagined Communities is an extremely conflictual work; no wonder that it has been interpreted in rather contradictory ways. It appears to be the book that overrides and brings together various disciplines, standpoints and theories which otherwise do not share the slightest interest, such as Smith’s historical works, or Homi Bhabha’s densely theoretical essays. Most critics acknowledge that Anderson’s book has transformed the field of nationalism studies, yet the way they position it between modernist and postmodernist arguments varies; whereas Smith complains that *Imagined Communities* hides a “dangerously deconstructive” bias, Bhabha claims that it is exactly this insight in Anderson’s work that he should have elaborated on. According to Smith, Anderson puts “an excessive emphasis on the idea of the nation as a narrative of the imagination, a text to be read and grasped and deconstructed through literary categories and devices. The result is that casual explanations of the character and spread of a specific type of community and movement tend to be overshadowed or relegated” (*Nationalism and Modernism* 138). In Smith’s terminology, “deconstruction” always has ironical and negative connotations, since, according to him, it is “corrosive” of established theories (“[t]he deconstruction of the nation foreshadows the

demise of the theory of nationalism” [*Nationalism and Modernism* 3]), thus it is no wonder that he uses this term to criticise *Imagined Communities*. Bhabha, on the other hand, claims that Anderson’s text is not “deconstructive” enough:

The space of the arbitrary sign, its separation of language and reality, enables Anderson to emphasize the imaginary or mythical nature of the society of the nation. However, the differential time of the arbitrary sign is neither synchronous nor serial. In the separation of language and reality – in the *process* of signification – there is no epistemological equivalence between subject and object, no possibility of the mimesis of meaning. (158)

What Bhabha means here is that Anderson builds his theories on the synchronous and serial nature of the sign when claiming that the “ceremony” of reading newspapers “is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions),” which presupposes that the imagined community, despite its textual nature, is brought to life as a univocal, miraculous collectivity. This assumption, of course, goes against Derrida’s version of deconstruction, which had a profound influence on Bhabha (the very title of his essay, “DissemiNation,” pays homage to Derrida’s works), since Derrida regards the mimesis of meaning that would be the basis of such synchronous, univocal, collective evocations of the imagined community, impossible.

There is a rather big difference between the first edition of *Imagined Communities*, published in 1983, and the second, which appeared in 1991, and this makes it even more difficult to understand Anderson’s ambivalent position. During the intervening years, Anderson rethought his earlier argument, partly as a result of the criticism that he had received, and added two more chapters to his original work, while leaving the rest unchanged. The first of these, “Memory and Forgetting,” investigates a question he had not really been

concerned with before: Anderson realises that he has misunderstood Renan and has not paid sufficient attention to the role of *forgetting* involved in the act of imagining communities. According to Renan, “Or, l’essence d’une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses...” [“In fact the essence of a nation is that all the individuals have many things in common and also that they have all forgotten many things”] (Quoted in Anderson 199). That is, in the very last chapter of his book, added eight years later to the original work, Anderson realises that it is not the self-conscious, simultaneous and collective imagining of communities that constitutes nations, but the very impossibility of remembering: “All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific circumstances, spring narratives” (204). These narratives appear as unselfconscious and insistent impulses, redefining the nation along the lines of the Freudian notion of transference, as an entity that “can not be ‘remembered,’” and therefore “must be narrated” (204). Obviously, Anderson has moved away from his thesis of the nation as an *imagined* community and at this point only focuses on its *narrative* aspects, which were already in evidence when he proposed that novels and newspapers enable the imagining of nations, yet were overshadowed by the unitary imaginary vision suggested by the very title of his book. In this chapter, however, Anderson no longer holds on to his misunderstood version of Benjamin’s “homogeneous empty time”: instead of the omnipotent Cogito responsible for imagining the nation, what we find is an amnesiac, psychologically estranged and solitary subject, unsure of his identity, and quite akin to the postmodern conception of subjectivity:

How strange it is to need another’s help to learn that this naked baby in the yellowed photograph, sprawled happily on rug or cot, is you! The photograph, fine child of the age of mechanical reproduction, is only the most peremptory of a huge modern

accumulation of documentary evidence (birth certificates, diaries, report cards, letters, medical records, and the like) which simultaneously records a certain apparent continuity and emphasizes its loss from memory. Out of this estrangement comes a conception of *identity* (yes, you and that naked baby are identical) which, because it can not be ‘remembered,’ must be narrated. (204)

Anderson quotes this example as the allegorical story of modern nations: “[a]s with modern persons, so it is with nations,” (205) which, again, suggests that the kind of nation and subject he imagines go hand in hand. Instead of the imaginary and continuous nature of the nation and the self-confident Cogito proposed in the first chapter, what we find here is a fragmented story, tainted by ruptures; the compass that helps to orient the subject is the product of the “age of mechanical reproduction” (birth certificates, diaries, photos, and so on), and only provides external reference points, artificially fixed nodes, instead of the plenitude offered by the place that was granted for the subject in the “imagined community.” Anderson never quite draws the conclusions these new insights would suggest as regards his very thesis, and this makes his book rather incoherent, since, at this point, the univocal nature of the imagined community as well as the authority of the imagining Cogito become challenged, opening the way towards postmodern insights. Also, at this point, Anderson moves closer to how Habermas and Buck-Morss interpret Benjamin’s conception of temporality, though he never admits that he misunderstood Benjamin just as he had misunderstood Renan. All in all, I regard Anderson’s work both as the apotheosis of the metaphysical vision of the nation and its unintentional, unselfconscious subversion: in its final pages the nation is no longer the autonomous community of self-conscious individuals, but an ambivalent story written upon collective amnesia. *Imagined Communities* thus indeed acts as a “mediator” between the

modern discourse of the nation and postmodern theories, inspiring a number of critics to elaborate on its hinted and latent insights.

Postmodern Nations?

After Anderson, there has been a proliferation of approaches and alternatives, locating the nation in or against postmodernism in various ways. Smith, for instance, claims that everything that came after “healthy” modernist theories signals decline:

Moving beyond the older paradigm, new ideas, methods and approaches, hardly amounting to an alternative paradigm, yet corrosive of the established orthodoxies, have called into question the very idea of the unitary nation, revealing its fictive bases in the narratives of its purveyors. The deconstruction of the nation foreshadows the demise of the theory of nationalism. (*Nationalism and Modernism* 3)

According to Smith, we still live in the modern age,⁵² and though new conditions of existence have emerged as a result of globalization, technological revolutions, and various other developments, it is still ethnic ties that explain “the resurgence of ethnic nationalism at a time when ‘objective’ conditions might appear to render it obsolete” (*Global Era* 7). For him, ethnically defined nations appear to be almost like “bedrocks,” which remain with us despite unfavourable conditions, whereas for William H. McNeill, for instance, it is exactly the other way round: as he argues, it is nations that were “ephemeral,” the symptoms of modernity, which have already started to pass away in the 20th century. According to him, poliethnicity is

⁵² “There is no doubt that modernity has brought a revolution in the ways in which we conceive of the world and feel about the societies into which it is divided. Perhaps the moment has at last arrived to realize the hope of Marx and Engels that a common literature and culture can emerge out of the many national cultures and literatures” [Smith, *Global Era* 1-2]).

the norm of civilized societies, “whereas the ideal of an ethnically unitary state was exceptional in theory and rarely approached in practice” (4).⁵³

Several postmodern critics, similarly to McNeill, argue that postmodernity is virtually incompatible with the idea of the modern nation. Quite a number of writings advocate the condition of “postnationalism” and “transnationalism,” signalling the crisis the nation is going through in contemporary theoretical investigations. Arjun Appadurai, for instance, similarly to Masao Miyoshi, insists on the need to acknowledge that we live under a postnational constellation, since migration, the media, and the proliferation of multiple, transcultural identities have created a borderless world, which can no longer provide a space for closed, homogeneous imagined communities. Despite the proliferation of the prefix “post,” however, these critics do not question the existence of nations and nationalism, just their *territorial* basis (therefore Miyoshi’s metaphor: borderless). In Appadurai’s words:

The nationalist genie, never perfectly contained in the bottle of the territorial state, is now itself diasporic. Carried in the repertoires of increasingly mobile populations of refugees, tourists, guest workers, transnational intellectuals, scientists, and illegal aliens, it is increasingly unrestrained by ideas of spatial boundary and territorial sovereignty. (413)

Diasporic, borderless, non-territorial, therefore “postmodern”: the nation in these writings is caught in the web of a diffuse, Foucauldian notion of power, which functions without a stable core. Its features and the emotional baggage it carries seem to remain the same (emotional

⁵³ McNeill argues that national unity is a “barbarous ideal,” which was imposed upon heterogeneous groups of people: “In the last lecture I analyzed the strange case of national ethnic unity, a barbarous ideal, never perfectly realized in western Europe, yet enthusiastically embraced at exactly the time when western European nations were building world-girdling empires, where diverse people met and mingled on a scale never equalled before. The consequent poliethnic hierarchy in all the lands of European expansion contrasted sharply with the ideal of national unity that prevailed in the part of Europe most active in imperial venturing” (59).

manipulation, sometimes bloodlust, the rhetoric of kinship, and so on), only divorced from the territorial basis which defines the modern nation. Therefore, the “postnation,” paradoxically, appears to be an even more powerful force than the Andersonian “imagined community,” as the metaphor of releasing a genie from the bottle suggests.⁵⁴ In other words, these theories, quite in contrast with Smith’s argument, or even McNeill’s expectations (who does not really leave room for the “national genie” in poliethnic communities), do not do away with the nation in postmodernism, but relocate it in a self-consciously postmodern framework.

This is what Homi Bhabha attempts as well, although through quite different means. He devotes an entire essay to re-reading Anderson from a postmodern perspective (the critics quoted above simply take his definition as a starting point, but do not really engage with his argument): in “DissemiNation,” published in Bhabha’s collection of essays entitled *The Location of Culture*, he re-examines parts of *Imagined Communities*, though he does not really criticise the entire argument of Anderson’s book either; Anderson rather serves as an inspiration for his poststructuralist theories. Bhabha’s baroque sentences are rather challenging, and often become reduced to easily understandable trivia, as in Smith’s interpretation, who simply puts Bhabha in the basket of “deconstructivists,” “corrosive” to the established orthodoxies of nationalism studies. In his reading, Bhabha becomes the advocate of multiple identities and fragmented nations: “For Bhabha, national identities are composed of narratives of ‘the people,’ and they operate under a ‘doubled’ and ‘split’ signifier – split between past and present, the self and the other, and above all between pedagogical and performative narratives. This superimposed dualism fragments the nation” (*Nationalism and Modernism* 202). Smith enlists a number of binary oppositions here, which, in his view,

⁵⁴ Non-territoriality is a recurring argument in contemporary criticism. Quite similarly to Appadurai’s and Miyoshi’s argument, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt define the new global world order as a non-territorial, postmodern “Empire,” which has taken the place of the historical Empires of the past centuries: “In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding boundaries” (xii).

Bhabha's writings are concerned with (past and present, self and other, pedagogical and performative, etc.), yet he does not take it into consideration that what Bhabha wants is precisely to challenge the dominance of these dichotomies, since, following Derrida, he claims that they manifest themselves *in the very same gesture*, in the very same instance. Therefore, the nation is indeed split according to Bhabha, yet not because it has pedagogical and performative narratives, but because there is an overwhelming tension between its different addressees.

Let us investigate the ambivalent address of the nation that Bhabha proposes in more detail. As he argues, "the people" are addressed by the discourse of the nation in two ways: first, they become subjected to this discourse, to the national pedagogy sanctified by the authority of the past, and become its *objects*, as the silent, enduring, yet sanctified members of the nation. Second, "the people" also become the *subjects* of the nation's discourse, as miraculous, contemporaneous, disobedient entities:

It is precisely in reading between these borderlines of the nation-space that we can see how the concept of 'the people' emerges within a range of discourses as a double narrative movement [. . .]. We then have a contested conceptual territory where the nation's people must be thought in double-time; the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as the sign of the *present* through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process. (Bhabha 145).

In my interpretation, what Bhabha means here is that the utterance of “us,” which in Anderson’s theories provides the basis for a miraculously homogeneous “imagined community,” becomes caught in a double narrative movement, and does not simply illuminate a univocal present, but evokes a more complex temporal dimension. By always dragging the past with it (the nationally sanctified tradition which legitimises the very utterance), the “us” partly refers to a collective entity that has become the ideologically acceptable, cultural notion of nationhood (for instance, the “miserable Hungarian” sanctified by the Hungarian national anthem). Yet this very same utterance also involves a contemporaneous dimension, addressing me and you, as subjects of this pedagogical vision. And it is exactly this dimension of the address that becomes slippery in Bhabha, through a Derridean gesture, since the very fact that we are invited to participate in the pedagogical imagined community doubles the subjects of the utterance: its addressee becomes both the “miserable Hungarian” encoded in the national anthem and the “people” singing along this most spectacular evocation of the imagined community. In other words, the desire to reiterate and repeat the nation, and thus the very desire to imagine it as a community, involves a challenge as regards its pedagogical foundations.

All the oppositions that Smith enlists in his reading of Bhabha appear here: the doubling of the nation’s time, the split between past and present, pedagogical and performative gestures, and so on. Yet, contrary to Smith’s suggestion, Bhabha’s nation does not appear as a hopeless, fragmenting entity, struggling on its last legs. It is precisely the other way round: he leaves an unprecedented space for the nation’s subject, or “people,” who are able to intervene in the national imaginary in a way that was unconceivable in the modernist discourse. As we have seen, Anderson, for instance, while elevating the modernist Cogito to a spectacular metaphysical height, simultaneously silences the subject of the nation, who remains the passive object of imagined communities; genderless, classless, and faceless, the

modern subject, while being endowed with the power to imagine and create, becomes subjected to the very omnipotent imagining that Anderson's text advocates. Bhabha's subject, on the other hand, while also genderless and quite uncontextualised, at least seems to possess a certain power to intervene into the otherwise omnipotent, pedagogical discourse of the nation. Bhabha "exchanges" Anderson's transcendent vision of the nation for an undeniably more fragmentary and splitting vision, yet what he gains with this is a self-conscious, active, intervening subject, or agent, who did not have a place in the discourse of nationalism studies before.

Bhabha never claims that he is writing about "the" postmodern nation. Conversely, he seems to be concerned with the idea of the modern: as he claims, "I am attempting to write of the Western nation" (140), and by this quite arbitrary and homogenising term (which in his essays usually denotes Great Britain) he seems to be referring to what has become "the" modern nation in my text. The performative, intervening gesture of the subject-agent is not a postmodern feature, but something that "always already" disturbs the narrative of the modern nation, through a Derridean gesture. It is there on the margin of modernity: whether he reads Gellner or Anderson, Bhabha always manages to find that ambivalent dimension which he regards performative, uncontainable by pedagogical discourses.⁵⁵ His strategies are hardly surprising, of course, since, as a poststructuralist critic, he attempts to challenge any presupposed "originary presence," whether nation, identity, or the autonomous, self-contained Western subjectivity.

⁵⁵ When quoting Gellner, for instance, what catches Bhabha's attention is, of course, his suggestion that there is an aspect of invention in the creation of the modern nation. However, in Bhabha's language, Gellner's invention becomes a conflict between "the contingent and arbitrary signs and symbols that signify the affective life of the national culture," a gesture that profoundly disturbs the self-contained narrative of the modern nation: "Such ideological ambivalence nicely supports Gellner's paradoxical point that the historical necessity of the idea of the nation conflicts with the contingent and arbitrary signs and symbols that signify the affective life of the national culture. The nation may exemplify modern social cohesion but 'Nationalism is not what it seems, and *above all not what it seems to itself*.... The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions' (142).

In my view, there is less difference between the *structure* of the modern nation in the discourse of “modernists” and in that of Homi Bhabha than Smith supposes. As I have argued in the previous section, the nation, for some reason, occupies that crucial yet conflicting space in modernity which lies at the heart of the modern “enterprise” according to Benjamin, Habermas, and several other critics. It manages to ride on an antithetical current which involves both the evocation of “corresponding pasts” and the invocation of an uncompromising, teleological image of the future, or, to put it simply, the attempt to “restore” the past and an unceasing desire to bring about a golden age in paradise. In modernity, the nation engenders the temporal split that causes its schizophrenia, and by this act, it both evokes the androgynous unity as a haunting fantasy and splits the discourse into an “atavistic” feminine and a “progressive” masculine face, read by all too familiar, stereotypical images which prohibit the institution of any androgynous fluidity.

It is this very split that Bhabha revisits. His notion of the “*pedagogical*” is quite akin to that atavistic (feminine) face that we have seen being reproduced again and again in modernity: as he claims, the nation’s interrupted address both signifies “the people as an a priori historical presence, a pedagogical object” (147), and a performative intervention, constructing the people “in the performance of narrative, its enunciatory ‘present’ marked in the repetition and pulsation of the national sign” (147). The people as “an a priori historical presence, a pedagogical object” mark a backward-turning, insistent, pedagogical impulse, akin to modernist discourses, though, undeniably, Bhabha exchanges the progressive, teleological face for the more ambivalent, “*performative*” intervention, and here lies the transformation that interests me. The homogeneous vision of the modern nation and the engendering of the temporal split, in my view, have hidden the impulse to counteract any kind of fragmentation that “threatened” this sacred entity, whereas in Bhabha’s discourse, and also in Rushdie’s texts, there is no such attempt to “mend” (and mind) the gap, and it is not the

split that becomes gendered at all (the pedagogical remaining the feminine and the performative becoming the masculine), but the very performative aspect of the nation becomes further and further torn in a spectacularly gendered way (more about this later). Bhabha's text is, however, quite gender blind; he pays attention neither to the engendering of "the" modern nation in the discourse he deconstructs, nor to that of his very own text, which is a pity, since this question, besides being crucial as regards the socially embedded nature of his performative and pedagogical subjects, also illuminates that desired wholeness and (androgynic) totality that otherwise interests him to a great extent.

Thus, Bhabha appropriates the Janus-faced nature of the modern nation in a spectacular and indeed postmodern way, transforming its teleological, progressive pole into a hardly definable yet rather subversive performativity, yet these impulses do not neatly support each other in his text, as they did in the modernist discourse of nationalism. Contrarily, in Bhabha, the performative challenges the pedagogical vision of the nation by every single utterance. Furthermore, it is not just the arbitrary support that is lost, but the androgynous totality as well, which the engendering of these poles provided: in Bhabha's text, the pedagogical does not have a feminine face, and the performative intervention hardly enacts a masculine challenge either, and these impulses do not converge in the moment of fusion. The nation no longer performs the modern family romance, prescribing easily predictable gender roles, and, therefore, does not appeal to an ideal wholeness (whether read as a Platonic notion or as the socially defined ideal of the family) that would counteract its underlying paradoxical tensions.

This does not mean, however, that Bhabha's nation entirely gives up an appeal to miraculous entities. In my view, such a plea becomes relocated in his discourse in the very notion of the *performative*, that uncontainable gesture which, as we have seen, provides voice for the subject, silenced so far in the discourse of nationalism studies, and also endows him

(or her?) with a miraculous power unprecedented before. The performative is defined as an iterative⁵⁶, uncontainable “strategy” in his discourse: “In the production of the nation as a narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative” (145). As against the “accumulative” pedagogical, the “recursive” performative takes charge, carrying the voice of the subject, and evoking a dimension of “beyond”: beyond the pedagogical, and also beyond ideology, containment, logic, and so on. This trope seems to be the synonym of the more Romantically charged notion of “beyond,” which appears in another essay by Bhabha, the “Introduction” to *The Location of Culture*, suggesting that this apparently “innocuous” postmodern metaphor has a more radical meaning:

Being in the ‘beyond,’ then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell ‘in the beyond’ is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side*. In that sense, then, the intervening space ‘beyond’ becomes a space of intervention in the here and now. (7)

Just like the performative, the beyond appears to be a “revisionary” category (“to dwell ‘in the beyond’ is also [. . .] to be part of a revisionary time”), the place of intervention, and a contemporaneous notion, despite its constant evocation of the future (beyond the present, the here and now, and so on). Bhabha self-consciously seems to be playing with a term that evokes the aesthetics of Romanticism with its heavy baggage of transcendence and neo-Platonism, turning this trope into its opposite, while unavoidably retaining some of its

⁵⁶ Bhabha relies on Derrida’s deconstructive approach not only in the context of nations and nationalism but in his understanding of language as well; see “Sly Civility,” “Of Mimicry and Men,” “Signs Taken for Wonders,” all published in *The Location of Culture*.

miraculous qualities, as if the “beyond,” as well as the “performative,” became all the hope and promise that Bhabha’s poststructuralist discourse is able to bear. It seems that the androgynous totality of modernity was at pains to establish between its conflicting temporal aspirations has been shifted into equally conflictual notions, the performative and the beyond: tropes that are defined against the pedagogical, or atavistic, yet contain the germs of harmonizing their own ambivalent desires, splitting (and fusing) into masculine and feminine aspects, and thus evoking the deceitful impulses of the modern nation. Rushdie’s fiction will provide several examples of this paradoxical process.

Bhabha’s definition of the nation as *address* shifts it into an entirely discursive domain: it is no longer an abstractly silent, imaginary entity, like in Anderson’s definition, but a *text* and a *voice*. In Rushdie’s fiction it is exactly this discursive nature of “the postmodern nation” that becomes foregrounded (though, just like Bhabha, his novels cannot entirely leave Anderson’s “imagined communities” behind), and it literally becomes a *voice* that is speaking to the subject and speaking the subject at the same time. The voice (or its absence) is also the central trope in the three novels I analyse, acting as a leitmotif, linking Rushdie’s fiction to Bhabha’s argument, and, at a further remove, to the discourse of the modern nation as well (which also leaks into Bhabha’s texts, as we have seen). This most ambivalent, unregulated trope, akin to Bhabha’s “performative” and “beyond,” helps to situate the “modern” nation in a self-consciously postmodern framework, which Rushdie’s novels quite spectacularly reproduce. Rushdie’s voice(s) also split into masculine and feminine aspects, similarly to the modern nation, speaking about unintelligible masculine sound effects and harmonious feminine music, and suggesting that the neo-Platonic promise of an androgynous wholeness becomes relocated into this subversive trope, similarly to Bhabha’s notion of the “performative,” though less opposed to any pedagogical or atavistic national discourse. I

argue that it is this ambivalent magic involved in the trope of the voice that the nation needs in order to find its place in the postmodern scene.

Obviously, not every critic regards the voice as such an unregulated, subversive trope. Derrida, for instance, has famously declared that it evokes a “metaphysics of presence,” providing the illusion of an unmediated listening and understanding, as opposed to writing; a dichotomy that runs through the Western metaphysical tradition. When I suggest that Rushdie’s voices carry a certain magic, a *promise* of an androgynous wholeness, I do not claim that voices in his texts entertain a daydream about unmediated, seamless presence, or a spectacular return of the triumphant modern nation. Voices in Rushdie’s novels do not function as proprietary notions, as entities that carry an irreducible core of individuality (which is what the “individual voice” has been designating since the eighteenth century, and still designates in certain varieties of feminist criticism⁵⁷), but they appear as Janus-faced phenomena, hesitant and radical at one and the same time.

Mladen Dolar also detects a certain ambivalence in the concept of the voice when he challenges Derrida’s criticism of logocentrism. As he claims, Derrida has not taken into account the fact that besides enacting the “metaphysics of presence,” the voice also had another side in the metaphysical tradition, a dangerous, threatening, uncontrollable aspect, which, instead of carrying an “irreducible individuality,” threatened to tempt and destroy the subject. This dangerous side of the voice is manifested in music, challenging the dominance of pure logos: “music, in particular the voice, shouldn’t stray away from words, which endow it with sense; as soon as it departs from its textual anchorage, the voice becomes senseless and threatening, all the more so because of its seductive and subversive powers” (17). Stephen

⁵⁷ As Stephen Connor writes, for instance, “[d]uring the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe, the operations of the voice became powerfully politicized. The agency of this change is the formation of an ethics of property, which put into place a concept of self related to itself in terms of ownership and possession, and worked to fix and assign the discourse of the self (for example in the coming into being of the idea of authorship), and to textualize voice” (226). It is also this “proprietary conception” of the voice that French feminist criticism, among others, relies on, for instance, when they claim to investigate the properties of the female voice (Connor also refers to an example, *Embodied Voices*, edited by Leslie C Dunn and Nancy A. Jones). Derrida’s critique of the “metaphysics of presence” concerns this understanding of the voice.

Connor also detects an ambivalence in the voice already in the texts of Christian theology. First, the voice appears in these texts of the “Fathers” as a “regenerative flame,” a miraculous entity that “makes possible division without diminution (embodying the emanation of the Son from the Father as pure *logos*), and second, as a “ventriloquial utterance,” a dirty, corporeal notion, caused by a demon that has taken up residence inside, and emanating from the genitals or anus:

This is the voice not as fire or light, but as what we have just heard Tatian refer to as ‘disorderly matter’; the cacophony or shit-voice, which is also, in hysterical approximation, the vagitus itself, the terrifying cry of birth that is at once the voice as the rending of a presence from the maternal genitals, and the voice of the genitals as rending. (Connor 224-25)

Both critics perceive a challenge in the “dangerous voice,” a challenge to *logos*, though the kind of voices that enact this seem to be quite different: for Dolar, it is a harmonious siren song, or music, while for Connor, it is the “unholy,” cacophonous “shit-voice.” These two aspects, nevertheless, reproduce well-known binary oppositions (the spirit and the body in Connor, the rational and irrational in Dolar), and, quite unsurprisingly, both of these critics make the marginal term subversive and supplementary, which, in a profoundly deconstructive way, reveals that the dominant category has never been complete in itself. As Dolar writes, “[f]or what endows the Law with authority is also what irretrievably bars it, and the attempts to banish the other voice, the voice beyond *logos*, are ultimately based on the impossibility of coming to terms with Law’s inherent alterity, places at the point of its inherent lack which voice comes to cover” (28). That is, the voice of the Law, or *logos*, despite its self-conscious

attempt to parade as an omnipotent entity, hides an “inherent alterity,” an “inherent lack,” which becomes deceptively covered.

For Dolar, the split in the voice also becomes gendered: “the voice beyond the sense is self-evidently equated with femininity, whereas the text, the instance of signification, is in this simple paradigmatic opposition on the side of masculinity. (Some four thousand years later, Wagner will write in a famous letter to Liszt, ‘Die Musik ist ein Weib,’ music is a woman.) (17)” Quite in contrast with the modern discourse of the nation, which saw the backward-looking, atavistic pole as feminine and endowed the venturesome, forward-thrusting impulse with a masculine face, Dolar’s voice seems to be engendered in a somewhat different way: it is the *subversive* gesture that becomes encoded as feminine (music), whereas “The word,” the logos appears as a masculine category. The trope of the voice, then, seems to unsettle various established categories that the discourse of the modern nation has taken for granted: whereas in the modernist discourse the function of the feminine was “to keep the rules,” here it is the feminine that challenges those very rules and launches an attack on the principles of modernity. The primary aim of this argument, being a profoundly poststructuralist one, lies in the attempt to foreground the marginal and subvert the dominant term, yet this assumption seems to be too idealistic, too purely and seamlessly theoretical, and raises the question whether we indeed witness such a resurgence of the feminine, the marginal, the previously silenced in the discourse of the postmodern nation. Is it this dimension that the split and continuously splitting voice in Rushdie’s fiction speaks about? Obviously, this would go against the arguments of McClintock, Yuval-Davies, and several other feminist critics, who do not perceive such radical alteration as regards gender roles in “postnational” discourses, though, nevertheless, regard it as a primary aim.

I argue that Rushdie’s “postmodern nations” appear at the margin of his texts, metaphorised through the trope of the voice, yet this voice, contrary to Dolar’s and Connor’s

expectations, strangely inherits a structure akin to that of the modern nation, especially as regards the engendering of its ambivalent, splitting aspects. Therefore, Rushdie's novels do not invent "postmodern nations," and these nations do not entirely possess the features one could "expect" from postmodern entities; instead, it is rather the *position* that his texts assign to nations that makes them "postmodern." In Rushdie's novels, similarly to Bhabha's expectations, we see the (re)production of a pedagogical and a performative vision of the nation: the pedagogical voice addressing "the people" as objects of its discourse often takes up attributes of feminine singing, whereas the performative, the ambivalent, the uncontainable manifests itself in the inarticulate, inanimate, and genderless trope of the "sound," and therefore suspiciously hides a masculine face. Thus, Rushdie's tropes reproduce a profoundly modernist range of stereotypes, endowing the feminine with the role to "keep the rules," and envisaging the possibility of a hesitant, semi-masculine intervention.

Contrary to Bhabha's argument, however, in Rushdie's novels we do not really witness a poststructuralist intervention of the performative sound into the pedagogical voice, unmasking its arbitrary and univocal nature, but the pedagogical constructions, which most of the time surface as national allegories, fall apart by themselves, independent of any intervention, since their empty structure cannot bear the burden the discourse of the nation puts on their shoulders. Therefore, it is the performative sound that takes up the burden of this "magic," the category that is least able to deal with it: the sound becomes the locus of secret cohesion, secret magic, and the secret the nation clings to in order to find a place it can appropriate in a postmodern text. It is this hesitant category that these texts attempt to launch against the main "enemy" of postmodern nations, which is not the pedagogical, as in Bhabha, not even the masculine logos, as in Dolar and Connor as well as Derrida, but *silence*, the lack of any voice, infertility, and erasure. I argue that in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie's "sounds," despite their promise and magic, fail to challenge the pedagogical rhetoric of the Indian

nation, since they remain too naïve, and need too much protection; for this reason, their intervention is only temporary. It is *The Satanic Verses* that envisages a more viable, though more diabolical alternative, which no longer needs the hiding spaces that the children needed, and provides a self-conscious alternative that is able to survive in the postmodern world.

The Promise:

Midnight's Children

Published in 1981, *Midnight's Children* opened a new phase in Rushdie's career as a writer. It is this novel that has made him famous: *Grimus*, the only novel published before, was largely unnoticed, whereas *Midnight's Children* won the Booker Prize in 1993, and was quite soon translated into a number of foreign languages, including Hungarian. Two years later, in 1983, *Shame* was published, followed by *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, and the fatwa in 1989, which marked a radical turning point in Rushdie's life as well as in his subject matters (he gave up writing about religion, and turned towards topics related to the West, especially the United States). Published in the same decade, these three novels are concerned with questions of nations, religion, identity, migration, the ambivalent relationship of East and West, and, underlying all these, the trope of voices. *Midnight's Children* is quite often read as a novel about India,⁵⁸ *Shame* as a novel about Pakistan, and *The Satanic Verses* as the novel of migration,⁵⁹ which already suggests that these texts share an underlying interest, enabling us to consider them as a loose trilogy (this is how Roger Y. Clark, the author of *Stranger Gods*, reads them). I argue that the most important thing that these novels share is that they all struggle with the desire to locate nations in a framework that is quite hostile to such miraculous ventures.

Midnight's Children deploys enchanting and miraculous voices that promise to speak about the Indian nation. The story begins in 1947, and the very first page takes the reader right

⁵⁸ See for instance Mark Williams, "The Novel As National Epic: Wilson Harris, Salman Rushdie. Keri Hulme"; Neil Ten Kortenaar, "*Midnight's Children* and the Allegory of History"; Joseph Swann, "East is East and West is West? Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as an Indian Novel," and so on.

⁵⁹ For a postcolonial analysis of the novel see Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation* (Brennan's book provides an insightful reading of the novel in an Indian context, a detailed analysis of mythology, history, etc. Brennan is not, however, interested in the theoretical questions that I am posing); Aruna Srivastava, "'The Empire Writes Back': Language and History in *Shame* and *Midnight's Children*"; Jaina C. Sanga, *Salman Rushdie's Postcolonial Metaphors*. For an analysis of *Midnight's Children* as a historical novel see Linda Hutcheon, *The Poetics of Postmodernism*; David W. Price, "Salman Rushdie's 'Use and Abuse of History in *Midnight's Children*," etc.

to the moment of India's independence, which is also the moment when Saleem Sinai, the novel's narrator, was born. As it later turns out, however, during the magic hour between 12.00 am and 1.00 am, 1001 children were born, the children of midnight, the allegorical creatures of the newly born India, so it is not only Saleem who embodies the Indian nation in the novel, but his 1001 extraordinary siblings as well. Therefore, this fantastic scenario provides two allegories that attempt to speak about the Indian nation in *Midnight's Children*: first, the body of Saleem Sinai, which, since the narrator was born exactly at the stroke of midnight, "had been mysteriously handcuffed to history" (9)⁶⁰, and second, the voices of midnight's children, the extraordinary concerto of "national unisonance," which literally embodies the imagined community of the Indian nation. These two allegories, Saleem's *body* and the *voice* of children, or, more exactly, their "sound,"⁶¹ both intersect, just as we would expect, since the voice is, apparently, produced by bodily organs,⁶² and challenge each other, or more precisely, the children's hesitant voice attempts to challenge the literally subdued body. In other words, in this novel, it is the voice around which we should look for the postmodern nation's hesitant yet miraculous hiding places.

The Embodied Nation

Let us first consider the allegory of Saleem's body, which becomes the "official" allegory of the Indian nation in *Midnight's Children*. The narrator informs the reader already on the first page of the novel that he has been mysteriously yet irrevocably summoned to become the representative of the newly born Indian nation:

⁶⁰ In the subsequent references to *Midnight's Children* in this chapter I am only going to indicate the page numbers of the novel.

⁶¹ I will discuss the difference between "voice" and "sound" later, when they become relevant. I am using "voice" instead of "sound" in the first half of this chapter, despite the fact that I will posit a major difference between these tropes, since this difference as well as the function of sound in Rushdie's texts will become clear only after the analysis of the allegory of the midnight's children.

⁶² As Steven Connor writes, in the metaphysical tradition, the voice is conceived as "the body's greatest power of emanation" (222).

Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. There were gaps. And, outside the window, fireworks and crowds. A few seconds later, my father broke his big toe; but his accident was a mere trifle when set beside what had befallen me in that benighted moment, because thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. (9)

The first word already evokes the image of the body ("clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came"), subtly striking a religious chord and calling to mind the image of praying, which already endows the newly born nation with transcendental importance, besides suggesting that the "hands" of the clock, similarly to Saleem's body, become helplessly subdued by a power quite inconceivable and beyond its poor, earthly "target." Then we learn that Saleem's father accidentally broke his big toe in that benign moment; his body also suffers the consequences of midnight, similarly to Saleem's, though his punishment is a "mere trifle set beside what had befallen him, who will bear the burden of his magic "gift" all through his life: "thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously *handcuffed* to history, my destinies indissolubly *chained* to those of my country" (9). The image of the chained body, being literally handcuffed, illuminates how *Midnight's Children* envisages the place of Saleem in the nation: he becomes the representative of India as an enchained creature, since his body, paradoxically, both "contains" the nation and becomes its helplessly subdued part, as the gesture of handcuffing suggests. His passive, feeble body, handcuffed to the nation, provides the first, "official" national allegory in the novel, which leaves Saleem entirely *silenced*, "without a say in the matter": "For the next

three decades, there was to be no escape. Soothsayers had prophesised me, newspapers celebrated my arrival, politicians ratified my authenticity. I was left entirely without a say in the matter” (9).

At the same time we also learn that Saleem is exactly 31 years old when he starts to narrate the tale of his life, which is, of course, also the tale of India: “Now, however, time (having no further use for me) is running out. I will soon be thirty-one years old. Perhaps. If my crumbling, over-used body permits” (9). Being 31 years old and overtly conscious about his time running out, Saleem seems to be preparing for his final day of reckoning; thus it is not only the praying clock-hands at his birth that evoke religious overtones, but his Christ-like “last supper,” the very text we are reading, also endows his life with religious significance. His body is, however, not the only one in the novel that becomes subdued by religious rituals: in another episode, still in the very first chapter, we learn how Saleem’s grandfather, Aadam Aziz, lost his belief after an act of unsuccessful praying; the act subdues his body, just like handcuffing subdued Saleem. We see Aziz standing in front of the prayer-mat, “his *hands*, guided by old memories, fluttered upwards, *thumbs* pressed to *ears*, *fingers* spread,” he sinks “to his *knees*” (11; emphases added), attempts to pray, but a tussock smites him “upon the point of his *nose*” (12; emphasis added), as a result of which he becomes “unable to worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve” (12). That is, the act of subduing the body, performed both “by the nation” embodied in “blandly saluting” clock-hands and the prescribed Islamic religious ritual, also speaks about how these acts become intertwined, how the “nation’s gesture” also takes up religious significance, and thus how the national discourse puts Saleem into a semi-religious, transcendental, Messianic position, which, at the same time, requires total submission. In other words, the body allegory, which, in Bhabha’s terminology, acts as the “pedagogical” allegory of the nation, becomes messianic speech, similarly to the discourse of the teleological, modern nation, turning Saleem, its “son,” into a

messiah, who is unable to fulfil his role yet bears the burden of its nonetheless heavy demands. This gesture of silencing, as well as the transcendental significance with which it endows itself, reminds the reader of the modernist discourse of nationalism studies, and establishes a version of the nation against which the trope of the voice is going to launch its hesitant “attack.”

In another episode, Saleem’s body literally becomes transformed into the body of India. During a geography lesson, the half-mad teacher, Mr Zagallo, who is terribly frustrated by the pupils’ absence from class, takes his revenge by asking a question that almost none of them can answer. Poor Saleem, trying to help one of his classmates whom Zagallo is ruthlessly torturing, unfortunately calls attention to himself and becomes the target of the frustrated teacher’s anger. Unable to explain what “human geography” is, Saleem’s very body becomes the explanation, the straightforward, “corporeal” answer to Zagallo’s question: “‘You don’t see?’ he guffaws. ‘In the face of thees ugly ape you don’t see the whole map of *India*? [. . .] See here – the Deccan peninsula hanging down!’ [. . .] ‘These stains,’ he cries, ‘are Pakistan! Thees birthmark on the right ear is the East Wing; and thees horrible stained left cheek, the West! Remember, stupid boys: Pakistan ees a stain on the face of India!’” (231-32). Saleem’s very face becomes a map of the Indian nation, his body acting as “a place where meaning is enacted” (Brooks 38), a sort of “elementary nucleus” on which “power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes individuals” (Foucault, *Power* 98). The handcuffed silent material, then, the site of semi-religious entitlements and accompanying power games, is painfully reminded of his “messianic” role as the allegorical figure of the Indian nation all through the text.

It is no wonder that bodies tend to crack and fall apart in the novel. Unable to bear the burden of representing the nation, Saleem’s body is also visibly cracking while he is narrating the novel, and apocalyptically disintegrates in the last chapter, thus literally becoming

transformed into letters, into the very novel itself.⁶³ Already in the third chapter, Saleem discovers that his body, “buffeted by too much history (37),” is falling apart: “I ask you only to accept (as I have accepted) that I shall eventually crumble into (approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust” (37). The body, endowed with the miraculous yet heavy burden of representing the nation, cannot bear this weight for very long; Saleem’s disintegration into six hundred and thirty million particles, which refers to the population of India at the time of the writing of the novel, is the direct result of his sacred role, which imposes an artificial homogeneity upon the otherwise heterogeneous material (which, of course, speaks both about his body and the nation). In another episode, after his body has been mutilated in a number of ways,⁶⁴ Saleem himself realises that this supposed homogeneity is a myth that hides a more chaotic and painful entity which might erupt to the surface at any moment. After a slamming door chops off the top third of his middle finger, and he needs blood transfusion, it turns out that Saleem’s blood group matches neither of his parents’. The accident reveals that he is not “his” parents’ son, and, therefore, not the “real” midnight’s child (the baby was exchanged in the hospital by Mary Pereira, who had reasons of her own to challenge history). Saleem realises that the supposed homogeneity of the body, as well as his “identity,” are nonexistent categories: the body is, apparently, “homogeneous as anything. Indivisible, a one-piece suit, a sacred temple, if you will. It is important to preserve this wholeness. But the loss of my finger [. . .] has undone all that. [. . .] Uncork the body, and God knows what you permit to come tumbling out. Suddenly you are forever other than you were [. . .]” (237). The body is envisaged here as a “sacred temple,” which is, again, a religious metaphor, the worthy heir of the praying clock-

⁶³ For the significance of apocalypse in the novel see Teresa Heffernan, “Apocalyptic Narratives: The Nation in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*.” As she argues, the novel explores the apocalyptic concept of the nation, the Islamic umma, which is secured by the figure of the (un)veiled woman (above all, Jamila singer, whose significance I will discuss later in this chapter).

⁶⁴ First, by Zagallo, who, in his endeavours to explain “human geography,” lifts him by his hair, pulling it out and leaving a “monkish tonsure, a circle where hair would never grow again (232),” then by his envious classmates, who, unable to tolerate that he is dancing with one of the “best” European girls, humiliate him until Saleem can only save his pride by fight, resulting in the cutting of his middle finger by a slamming door.

hands of midnight, a homogeneous “one-piece suit,” yet what it contains, his very blood, challenges this sacred totality, making him forever different from his own self.

At this moment, it becomes obvious that the genetic code that has “written” the body, its “blueprint,” differs from the expected, which suggests that it is not even the corporeal body itself that is responsible for creating identity, but it is a simple code that keeps the features of the physical body together. Also, as we have seen in the episode that takes place in the geography class, when the teacher identifies Saleem’s body with the body of the nation, the nation inscribes itself on his body as well. Therefore, “identity” is simply the result of a multiple textual encoding, which is performed both by the genetic code and the pedagogy of national discourses; the cracking body in the novel is nothing but an empty vehicle for these allegorical processes.

Saleem’s grandfather, Aadam Aziz, also becomes subjected to disintegration. After losing his belief in an unsuccessful attempt at praying (when, while trying to enact the prescribed religious ritual, a tussock hits his nose and he resolves “never to kiss the earth for any god or man” [10]), which leaves a permanent hole “in a vital inner chamber” (10), he constructs his entire secular and modern life as a proud attempt to ignore this hole, infuriating his highly religious and bigoted wife. The hole inside, however, starts to demand attention in his declining years, which his grandson, Saleem, the “true” heir of holes and substitutes, immediately notices: “What leaked into me from Aadam Aziz: a certain vulnerability to women, but also its cause, the hole at the centre of himself caused by his (which is also my) failure to believe or disbelieve in God. And something else as well – something which, at the age of eleven, I saw before anyone else noticed. My grandfather had begun to crack” (275). Aziz’s body starts to crack since he is no longer able to obfuscate the fact that his entire life has been constructed as an attempt to conceal this hole (quite similarly to the very text itself, which, in a way, has grown out of an attempt to conceal the hole “founded” by Aziz’s

unsuccessful attempt at praying; see Tamás Bényei's reading⁶⁵), and dedicated to finding hopeless substitutes, such as women, whose semi-transcendental significance is simply due to fact that the hole has apparently retained the power of bestowing such qualities upon anything that happens to occupy it.⁶⁶ Thus, in his final years, when the disintegration of his body is already well-advanced, Aadam Aziz "often disgraced himself by stumbling into mosques and temples with his old man's stick" (277), returning to a God whom he has "forsaken" on the very first pages of the novel. However, while Aziz, seems to be quite self-conscious in creating the hole ("he *resolved* never to kiss the earth"), Saleem simply inherits it, and acts as a silent and passive subject again; by becoming handcuffed to the nation, he is also handcuffed to a "holey" inheritance, and the substitute he is going to find, despite his reference to women in the quotation above, who have never really been able to fill up his hole inside, will be the *voices* of midnight's children: "Women have fixed me all right, but perhaps they were never central – perhaps the place which they should have filled, the hole in the centre of me which was my inheritance from my grandfather Aadam Aziz, was occupied for too long by my voices" (192). The voice of the children, then, will act as a "magic glue" trying to mend the disintegration that pervades the entire novel, on many levels, serving as a remedy that induces anaesthesia and temporarily reduces the pain inflicted upon his body by the pedagogical national allegory.

⁶⁵ *Apokrif iratok*, chapter 5, "Szalím könyve."

⁶⁶ His wife, Naseem, who later turns into Reverend Mother, acts as the most obvious example of substitutes. The way Aziz falls in love with her, right after the loss of his belief and the creation of the hole in his "inner chamber," is already telling: Aziz, who has just returned from Germany, earning his degree in medicine, is summoned by the local landowner to examine his daughter, who is complaining of a "terrible, too dreadful stomach-ache" (23). The landowner is, however, a decent man, who does not flaunt the body of his daughter in front of the eyes of strange men, so Aziz has to examine her through a perforated sheet, with a hole, seven inch in diameter, cut in the very centre of it. After examining various parts of her body for three years, Aziz, of course, falls in love with the girl whom he has never seen, just as the landowner has planned: "So gradually Doctor Aziz came to have a picture of Naseem in his mind, a badly fitting collage of her severally-inspected parts. This phantasm of a partitioned woman began to haunt him, and not only in his dreams. Glued together by his imagination, she accompanied him on all his rounds, she moved into the front room of his mind, so that waking and sleeping he could feel in his fingertips the softness of her ticklish skin or the perfect tiny wrists or the beauty of the ankles [. . .]" (25). Aziz creates an imaginary woman in his mind, whose coming to life is literally due to a hole, filling in another hole inside, as if substituting one hole with another, in a profoundly poststructuralist fashion, yet the substitution also preserves the transcendental features of the very cause of the first hole – that is, God. In other words, the hole makes the things that occupy it sacred.

Saleem is not only handcuffed to the nation, his body is not simply dumb matter which enacts what clock-hands demand, despite his will, but he also becomes the *mirror* of India. After his magic birth, his parents receive a letter from the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, congratulating him on the happy “accident” of his moment of birth: “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” (122). Whereas handcuffing implies speechless subjection, mirroring suggests a certain insight into the totality of the Indian nation, though the mirror, similarly to the handcuffed body, remains dumb matter, a medium that passively “reflects” the act and will of others. Also, the fact that Saleem becomes the “newest bearer” of the “ancient face of India” (emphases added), suggests that his body, put in the place of the image in the mirror, bears the double burden of the ambivalent temporality of the modern nation, manifested in its Janus-faced desire to turn towards the future yet simultaneously evoke “corresponding pasts” in its attempt of legitimating and *sanctifying* its all too profane novelty (the gesture which also recurs in the image of praying clock-hands as well as the “sacred-temple” of the body). Saleem’s body allegorises the split at the heart of modernity, as it is envisaged by Walter Benjamin, and the Janus-faced temporality of the modern nation, as it is defined by Nairn. As an eternally-young-ancient-nation, his body is destined to embody the nation as a perfect entity, a seamless “creature,” and, in this very act, counteract the all too diverging impulses of the modern nation. His body is entitled to become perfect; perfect, in the way Lacan’s theory holds,⁶⁷ since he literally becomes the semi-transcendental mirror image of the nation, yet, with the

⁶⁷ According to Lacan, through envisaging the perfection of the mirror-image, the infant, besides realising where the boundaries of his body lay, also experiences a sense of alienation, a profound imperfection, a tension between his fragmented self and its totalised image in the mirror: “The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development” (*Écrits* 4).

very same gesture, he is also emptied of subjectivity, deprived of the basic sense of (not) seeing the boundaries of his very own self in the mirror (which the subject looking into the mirror, however alienated from its self, experiences). It is only such a perfect yet depthless imago that can counteract and erase all the tensions that haunt the modern nation, yet it is also no wonder that such an image, being empty inside, cannot bear the burden of its all too heavy perfection for long. The mirror cracks, just like Saleem's body, as well as the Indian nation, and the reader does not find her/himself in Alice's wonderland, stepping through mirrors into the magic realm that lies beyond;⁶⁸ the emptiness which the construction obfuscates will return just like the hole in Aadam Aziz's body, despite his attempt to fill it with his entire life.

The trope of *mirroring*, however, speaks about a different relationship with the nation than the gesture of *handcuffing*. Being handcuffed to the nation, at first sight, appears to be a metaphor, visualising how Saleem becomes tied to the nation, subdued by the nation, born as an Indian unalienable from his sense of "national identity," and so on. At a second glance, however, it becomes obvious that there is a metonymic-synecdochic impulse in this trope, since it also visualizes Saleem as a body *added to* the body of the nation, as a *part* handcuffed to the *whole* body of India. Therefore, the gesture of handcuffing destines Saleem to become a subdued part of the nation, whereas the act of mirroring puts him into the reverse position, lifting him above handcuffs and earthly matters. This double identification, making him a part joined to the whole and a part reflecting/replacing the whole, performs exactly the work of the *symbol*, the trope which presumes that the image "representing" the substance can indeed coincide with it. As Paul de Man writes, "[i]n the world of the symbol it would be possible for the image to coincide with the substance, since the substance and its representation do not

⁶⁸ One of the midnight's children, however, is even able to perform Alice's famous act: when Saleem describes the miraculous gifts of the children, he mentions a boy from Kerala, "who had the ability of stepping into mirrors and re-emerging through any reflective surface in the land – lakes and (with greater difficulty) the polished metal bodies of automobiles..." (198). That is, the boy from Kerala, just like Alice, seems to be able to step through mirrors, yet he does not end up in an enchanted world, but returns to "reality," which suggests that in Rushdie's novel, the magic lies in the very gesture, in the very act of performance, not in the discovery of the world that lies beyond.

differ in their being, but only in their extension: they are *part and whole* of the same set of categories” (*Blindness* 207). Therefore, the symbol, based on the relationship of part and whole, is synecdochic by nature. According to de Man, its structure is “that of the synecdoche, for the symbol is always part of the totality that it represents” (*Blindness* 191) – just like Saleem’s handcuffed body, remaining a fragment of India – yet in the very act of symbolising the trope is prone to forget this simple fact and bestows the ability of correspondence upon the image. To quote de Man again, by referring “to the infinity of a totality” (*Blindness* 188), the symbol provides a sense of security, since “it postulates the possibility of an identity” (*Blindness* 207).

The pedagogical discourse of the nation, then, enacts a speech that is *symbolic* by nature.⁶⁹ Defined by silence(ing), subjection, corporeality, perfection, semi-religious transcendence, and the stubborn denial of cracks, holes, and any kind of subjectivity, this discourse constructs the subject as an all too perfect creature who unavoidably disintegrates under the burden of his role. Perhaps this is not the aim of the nation’s discourse; perhaps its only desire is to “postulate the possibility of an identity,” or, in other words, to provide the promise of an untinctured selfhood, as Homi Bhabha assumes, when contemplating upon the role of symbols in culture (“Culture reaches out to create a symbolic textuality, to give the alienating everyday an *aura of selfhood*, a promise of pleasure” [185].) Yet the side effect of this discourse is nonetheless that the desired “aura of selfhood” turns into its exact opposite, and the empty imago of Saleem’s body cracks in the mirror. Any form of subjectivity appears to be too imperfect for this discourse, just like in Gellner’s and Anderson’s writings; the omnipotent Cogito, who exercises a powerful imagination yet seems to be incapable of

⁶⁹ The way the discourse of the nation addresses/interpellates Saleem is symbolic by nature, yet this does not question the fact that he experiences this identification as allegorical. He believes that he “became directly responsible for triggering off the violence which ended with the partition of the state of Bombay” (192); he suffers the loss of his body-parts as the fragmentation of India, thinking that everything happened because of him, Nehru’s single identification releases a never ending chain of events, thus making the subject experience the symbolic interpellation of power as an allegorical process.

uttering a word, retains its omnipotence exactly at the price of his or her subjectivity, and, quite ironically, considering the very allegory we are dealing with, *embodiment*. Therefore, the pedagogical nation in the novel, manifested in the apparently perfect yet underneath cracking body, is modern by nature.

Magic Voices

Whereas the official discourse of the nation is defined by the symbol as its primary mode of speech, the performative intervention that *Midnight's Children* envisages remains an allegorical venture. Allegorical, though not exactly in the Aristotelian-Romantic sense of the term (which presupposes that whereas the symbol suggests an indefinite number of possible meanings, and, therefore, acts as a more permissive and imaginative trope, allegory postulates one didactic referent, and, therefore, remains more arbitrary and “rational”) but in the sense of how Paul de Man and Joel Fineman, among others, have redefined this trope.⁷⁰ De Man reverses the hierarchical relationship between allegory and symbol, the all too obvious superiority of symbol over allegory, which even Gadamer presumes,⁷¹ and claims that

[w]hereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference. In so doing, it prevents the self from an illusory identification

⁷⁰ See, for instance, Paul de Man's *Allegories of Reading*, “The Rhetoric of Temporality” in *Blindness and Insight*, and Joel Fineman's “The Structure of Allegorical Desire” in *Allegory and Representation*.

⁷¹ “Symbol and allegory are opposed as art is opposed to non-art, in that the former seems endlessly suggestive in the indefiniteness of its meaning, whereas the latter, as soon as its meaning is reached, has run its full course” (quoted in de Man, *Blindness*, 188-189). Therefore, as de Man concludes, for Gadamer, “[a]llegory appears as dryly rational and dogmatic in its reference to a meaning that it does not itself constitute, whereas the symbol is founded on an intimate unity between the image that rises up before the sense and the supersensory totality that the image suggests” (*Blindness* 189).

with the non-self, which is now fully, though painfully, recognized as a non-self.
(*Blindness* 207)

In other words, for de Man, it is allegory that becomes more hesitant, since whereas the symbol, just like the pedagogical discourse of the nation in Rushdie's novel, postulates an identification, allegory seems to be more conscious of the obstacles in assuming such a seamless identity, since it primarily designates a distance to its very origin, a non-coincidence with what its "founding trope" assumed to have meant. Also, the symbol, apparently, can more easily identify subject and object, substance and image, since it is based on a single, non-recurring coincidence, however multiple, whereas allegory assumes a process (a teleological development in the Aristotelian tradition, and a deconstructive amassing of tropes in the de Manian), which takes the imago(s) rather far from their founding structure (which apparently functions as "self" or "truth" in de Man's discourse). In this way, allegory becomes more hesitant, less didactic, and more self-reflexive than the symbol, and, quite removed from the Enlightenment tradition, a trope more akin to poststructuralist endeavours, and also more "suitable" for the discourse of the postmodern nation. In *Midnight's Children*, I argue that the trope of the children's collective voice enacts such a postmodern, de Manian allegory,⁷² and this trope illuminates how the nation becomes narrated in the novel in a performative way, as against the synecdochic-symbolic mode that defined the nation's official, modern speech.

The children's magic voices start to speak about the nation only in the second book of the novel. Saleem, though he becomes aware of the burden of his miraculous birth at an early

⁷² Tamás Bényei reads *Midnight's Children* as a de Manian allegory, though his reading is less concerned with the extratextual dimensions of the allegory, and therefore, of its desire to narrate the nation, and focuses on its ambivalent search for referentiality and meaning, deciphering the different logic involved in the rampant tropes built upon its founding structure. Therefore, it is not the children's voices that he identifies as de Manian allegory, but the entire textual corpus of the novel, founded by the act of praying that Aadam Aziz performs and the hole that this gesture creates. See Tamás Bényei's *Apokrif iratok*.

age, does not that know he is not the only chosen “son” to represent the Indian nation until his 10th birthday. The discovery of the children’s voices, which is also the moment when the second national allegory inscribes itself into the text, takes place in an utterly profane, dirty, almost obscene place: in a washing chest. Saleem, who is continuously humiliated by his family, classmates, and relatives, and becomes less and less able to deal with their overwhelming expectations, finds his most comfortable as well as safest hiding place in the family’s washing chest. This place appears to be a “hole in the world,” a space curiously deprived of history, blind and semi-amnesiac, and, therefore, quite safe:

There are no mirrors in a washing-chest; rude jokes do not enter it, nor pointing fingers. The rage of fathers is muffled by used sheets and discarded brassières. A washing-chest is a hole in the world, a place which civilization has put outside itself, beyond the pale; this makes it the finest of hiding-places. In the washing-chest, I was like Nadir Khan in the underworld, safe from all the pressures, concealed from the demands of parents and history. (156)

The mirrors that identified Saleem so ruthlessly as the bearer of the ancient face of India, or, more precisely, the mirror as the manifestation of his very own empty self, the all too perfect imago reflecting the Indian nation, are missing here: “there are no mirrors in a washing chest” (156). “The rage of fathers,” the other implication that Saleem is unable to fulfil his national role (national and familial go hand in hand here, reproducing a rhetoric that national narratives often deploy⁷³), seems to have evaporated as well, so Saleem feels safe “from the

⁷³ The fact that Saleem is “concealed from the demands of *parents* and *history*” implies that *Midnight’s Children* imagines the nation as an extension of familial or kinship relationships, as it is defined by Anne McClintock, among other critics (see *Imperial Leather*). This familial rhetoric is quite common in national narratives; it also appears in the Hungarian novel, *Eclipse of the Crescent Moon* by Géza Gárdonyi: the narrative bestows the role of “the son of the nation” searching for father figures upon its main character, Gergely Bornemissza, as it is expected from a “respectable” national narrative. (For more details, see Ágnes Györke’s “Homéroszi eposztól a

demands of parents and history,” ready to leave his role as a midnight’s child behind. That is, Saleem, in his attempt to hide from the symbolic role bestowed upon him, finds a “*hole* in the world,” “which civilization has put outside itself,” an amnesiac, forbidden, dirty, and *secret* place, situated at the very edge of the symbolic world.

The way he enters this place is also quite telling. Saleem is hiding in several confined spaces, which appear to function as Chinese-boxes: first, we have to enter the house, then the bathroom, then the washing chest, and finally, Saleem’s very head (or nose?), and only in this last box, the most secretive, most confined of spaces, can the midnight’s children start singing their strange concerto: “Pain. And then noise, deafening manytongued terrifying, *inside his head!* ... Inside a white wooden washing-chest, within the dark auditorium of my skull, my nose began to sing” (162, emphasis in the original). Furthermore, the text also appears to follow a similar trail: until this chapter (which is entitled “Accident in a washing-chest,” ironically degrading the miraculous “revelation”), Saleem’s companion, the extremely down to earth narratee, Padma, has been listening to his stories; she, utterly disrespectful of his story-telling, acted as a “check” on his exceedingly imaginative narrative, which she quite often interrupted with sceptical remarks (such as “[b]ut what is so precious [. . .] to need all this writing-shiting?” (24), “So now that the writery is done, let’s see if we can make your other pencil work!” (39), and so on). Padma, however, who would clearly have entertained some disbelief concerning the events happening in this most crucial of chapters, has

Nagy Könyvig: 1901 Gárdonyi Géza: *Egri csillagok*”). *Midnight’s Children* apparently reproduces this structure as well, yet the episode discussed above also reveals that Saleem’s search for father figures is far from being a self-conscious and brave quest for the nation’s salvation (not to mention that the fathers he finds are often disresponsible as well; the list that he compiles includes quite a bastard, hybrid parentage, in line with the novel’s poststructuralist stance: “all my life, consciously or unconsciously, I have sought out fathers. Ahmed Sinai, Hanif Aziz, Sharpsticker sahib, General Zulfikar have all been pressed into service in the absence of William Methwold; Picture Singh was the last of this noble line” (426). No matter how hybrid the list is, however, the novel imagines the nation as a story primarily structured by the son’s endeavours of finding a father, similarly to the *Eclipse*. The familial rhetoric employed in the discourse of nationalism, obviously, functions as a means of naturalizing a set of relationships that are taken for granted: the state assuming the role of acting as a “father,” women becoming summoned by the “nation” as reproducers of its sons, and so on. See, for instance, Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Nira Yuva-Davis, *Gender and Nation*; Geraldine Heng and Janadas Devan’s “State Fatherhoods: The Politics of Nationalism, Sexuality, and Racism in Singapore”; Katherine Verdery, “From Parent State to Family Patriarchs: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Eastern Europe.”

fortunately stormed out of Saleem's life just before he starts recounting the discovery of the midnight's children: "It has been two whole days since Padma stormed out of my life. [. . .] A balance has been upset; I feel cracks widening down the length of my body; because suddenly I am alone, without my necessary ear, and it isn't enough" (149). The carefully instituted balance that controlled the narrative, acting as a safety valve, becomes lost, left behind, similarly to mirrors and the rage of fathers, leaving Saleem alone in the vacuum of this most confined physical space, which, in this way, also becomes the least controlled place in the novel.

When he actually articulates the presence of the children's voice in his head, the loss of balance seems to be complete: the first person narrative shifts into the third person ("[a]nd then noise, deafening manytongued terrifying, *inside **his** head!*" [emphasis added with bold fonts]), as if the traumatic experience had indeed induced a semi-schizophrenic state of mind, making Saleem both an observer and participant in this most magic of moments.⁷⁴ The event acts as a traumatic rupture for Saleem, manifesting itself as such on the very body of the text as well; a momentary black-out (or transcendence?), which is, after all, the logical outcome of leaving behind the authoritative gaze of parents and history. For a split second, Saleem finds himself beyond language, order, and the symbolic, and it is only after the ellipsis of three dots that he and his narrative regain balance: the text shifts back to the first person, and Saleem immediately recounts the Chinese box-like structure of his hiding place, as if ascertaining his very being and existence: "... Inside a white wooden washing-chest, within the darkened auditorium of *my* skull, *my* nose began to sing (162, emphasis added)."

Several other factors indicate the traumatic nature of the "accident." First, quite unexpectedly, Saleem's mother appears in the bathroom. She is, of course, not aware of his

⁷⁴ There are several other episodes in the novel when the first person narrative shifts into the third person, even whole chapters, such as "The Buddha" and "In the Sundarbans," which recount the time Saleem spends in Pakistan as the dog of a secret unit called C.U.T.I.A. These episodes, just like the passage I have analysed before, suggest that Saleem goes through an identity crisis (he even forgets his very name).

son's presence, and, believing that she is alone, whispers the name of a man who is not Saleem's father, but Nadir Khan, her former, "half-official" husband. What is more, reminiscing about what they used to do in the badly-lit cellar of her parents' house, "her hands are moving" (161): "they flutter gladly at her cheeks; they hold her bosom tighter than any brassières; and now they caress her bare midriff, they stray below decks...." (161). The aforementioned brassieres return here, and, at this point, become identified with parts of the female body, which they have already foreshadowed when Saleem claimed that in the washing chest, "[t]he rage of fathers is muffled by used sheets and discarded brassieres" (156). The female body acts as a spectacle in this scene, as if it literally became the thing that "muffles" the rage of fathers and the demands of history, the image that attempts to defy the symbolic national discourse. There is a psychological impulse at work here, as if the image of the sinful (!) female has indeed taken the place of the perfect imago, replacing Saleem-in-the-mirror, and occupying the space where "history" has been before. Whereas the previous image was full of promise, purity, and perfection, the body that we encounter here is sinful and transgressive, yet the sight of it nonetheless appears to be quite irresistible for the nine-year-old Saleem. No wonder that the event is traumatic: Saleem experiences exactly what the pure symbolic discourse has denied him thus far: situated in the dirty washing chest, among used sheets and discarded brassieres, the plenitude of the "sacred temple" of the body, the very basis of the national allegory, is exchanged for sin, disorder, as well as a profound *lack*.

Many other things refer to this lack. First, the very Chinese-box like hiding place of Saleem, besides indicating the chain of transgressions he has to perform in order to reach the most secretive of spaces, also evokes a number of empty containers, like Russian dolls: the smaller is always contained by the bigger, thus filling in its empty interior. Also, the fact that he is hiding among "used *sheets* and discarded brassieres" evokes another sheet in the novel, the "perforated sheet," which was his grandfather's legacy, and which also serves as

Saleem's talisman in writing the novel. This was the sheet through which Aadam first had a glimpse of his wife-to-be, so it was this sheet that led to the filling up of that other hole inside him, created by the loss of religious faith ("[i]n short: my grandfather had fallen in love, and had come to think of the perforated sheet as something sacred and magical, because through it he had seen the things which had filled up the hole inside him which had been created when he had been hit on the nose by a tussock and insulted by the boatmen Tai" [27]). In this way, the children's voices indeed fill a range of empty holes, Saleem's head being the last Chinese-box in the line, suggesting that they definitely act as substitutes, similarly to the image of the female body in Aadam Aziz's mind (which suggests another parallel between these episodes: both men are voyeurs, peeping at female bodies through a hole). However, if we attempt to decipher what it is exactly that they attempt to substitute, the answer does not seem to be quite straightforward.

Perhaps Freud could be of help at this point. The sight of his mother's naked body, besides contributing to the overwhelmingly "sinful" nature of the episode, evokes another kind of fear in Saleem which was first described by Freud. Acting as a proper Freudian "patient," he appears to be both terrified and lured by the sight of his mother's body: "Don't do it don't do it don't do it don't do!... but I cannot close my eye" (161). He describes his undressing mother in terms that are apparently objective and scientific, as if he wanted to distance the very subjective experience from himself: "Unblinking pupil takes in upside-down image of the sari falling to the floor, an image which is, as usual, inverted by the mind" (161). As Freud writes, "the moment of undressing [is] the last moment in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic" ("Fetishism" 354); at the moment of confrontation, the body loses its apparent "totality," and the feeling of an all pervading lack and fear, which he famously defined as castration-complex, ensues. When Saleem glimpses the naked body, the terms he used to portray the undressing woman also change; he describes the vision he sees in words

that are not only scientific, but also degrading: “And there it is, searing my retina – the vision of my mother’s rump, black as night, rounded and curved, resembling nothing on earth so much as a gigantic, black Alfonso mango!” (161-62). However, as Freud writes, the child cannot entirely deny that the female body is “phallic”⁷⁵; thus, at the moment of confrontation (“while Amina Sinai seats herself on a commode” [162]) he creates a substitute, a fetish, which possesses the “phallic” qualities that the perceived vision lacks, thus endowing it with an imaginary plenitude that counteracts its “holey” emptiness.⁷⁶

It is this very moment that the midnight’s children start to produce their strange “noise” inside Saleem’s head. As a result, their “noise” becomes endowed with the imaginary plenitude that the traumatic moment inevitably erases: the thing that they substitute seems to be an originary, psychoanalytic “wholeness,” which is evoked by a gradual, transgressive locking out of the symbolic world, and as a plenitude that counteracts a certain terrifying emptiness.⁷⁷ Yet the children’s voice, the founding metaphor of the second national allegory, is not simply the antithesis of the symbolic discourse that is “locked out”; it is not just an entity that fills in the lack that the symbolic discourse was at pains to deny. Rather, possessing the structure of the fetish, it has the power to *transform* lack itself into a miraculous plenitude; it has the power to counteract the pains of trauma through *metaphorising* an imaginary totality into a perceivable, audible entity. The voice, then, as a substitute and “side effect” of Saleem’s traumatic story, acts as a peculiar “site of truth,” similarly to the argument of Cathy Caruth: as she claims, commenting on Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata*, “Tancred’s story [. . .] represents traumatic experience not only as the enigma of a human agent’s repeated and

⁷⁵ “It is not true that, after the child has made his observation of the woman, he has preserved unaltered his belief that women have a phallus. He has retained that belief, but he has also given it up” (“Fetishism” 353).

⁷⁶ „[I]n his mind the woman *has* got a penis, in spite of everything; but this penis is no longer the same as was before. Something else has taken its place, has been appointed its substitute, as it were, and now inherits the interests which was formerly directed to its predecessor. [. . .] We can now see what the fetish achieves and what it is that maintains it. It remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it” (“Fetishism” 353).

⁷⁷ According to Freud, the fetish inherently possesses such an ambivalent structure, since “*both* the disavowal and the affirmation of the castration have found their way into the construction of the fetish” (“Fetishism” 356, emphasis added).

unknowing acts but also as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know” (3). In other words, it is the voice that comments on that “something” that resists comprehension in trauma; that “truth” which remains inaccessible for the subject.

Before Saleem actually articulates the fetish metaphor, his mind becomes “filled with thoughts which have no shape, tormented by ideas which refuse to settle into words” (161), already suggesting that what he articulates will order the chaos in his mind into a conceivable “reality,” or, in de Man’s words, will freeze “the hypothesis, or fiction, into fact” (*Allegories* 151). When he finally arrives at articulating the metaphor, he seems to be evoking the scenario of giving birth:

Pajama-cord rises painfully an inch further up the nostril. But other things are rising, too; hauled by that feverish inhalation, nasal liquids are being sucked relentlessly up up up, nose-goo flowing upwards, against gravity, against nature. Sinuses are subjected to unbearable pressure.... until, inside the nearly nine-year-old head, something bursts. Snot rockets through a breached dam into dark new channels. Mucus, rising higher than mucus was ever intended to rise. Waste fluid, reaching as far, perhaps, as the frontier of the brain... there is a shock. Something electrical has been moistened. Pain. And then noise, deafening many-tongued terrifying, *inside his head!* (162).

A pajama-cord carnivalistically irritates Saleem’s nose in the washing chest, sending his “nose-goo” upwards in his nasal passages, until it reaches the frontiers of his brain, making him sneeze and his nose “sing” – a very profane act indeed, almost obscenely biological by nature, just like the description of his mother’s naked body. The “rising mucus,” the

unbearable pressure on the sinuses, the metaphor of the “breached dam” and the gesture of bursting evoke the pain and labour involved in the act of giving birth, making the second national allegory, similarly to the pedagogical-symbolic one, enact a quasi-Bildungsroman, which, despite the all-pervading fragmentation in the novel, and its “hero’s” final disintegration instead of psychic and social integrity, does involve teleological impulses (and also indicates the obsession of national discourses with the idea of birth: even the performative allegory does not seem to be able to leave the official rhetoric of the “new born India” behind).⁷⁸ There seems to be, however, a considerable difference between the two scenarios: first, whereas Saleem’s birth was followed by a celebratory article in the *Times of India* and congratulating letters from the Prime Minister, here we only encounter dirty laundry, sin, fear, and transgression, which already creates a profound opposition between the “public” and “private” discourses. Second, it seems that, quite paradoxically, contrary to the previous images analysed, the description of the female body, and the sneeze, Saleem’s biological birth, described on the very first page of the novel, was less explicitly “biological” in its description: when recounting his birth, Saleem was only concerned with metaphors such as handcuffing and chaining, praying clock-hands, and so on, as if he “purified” his birth from biological aspects, and elevated it above such “dirty” matters. Whereas the first birth was “silent” (“I was left entirely without a say in the matter”),⁷⁹ here noise seems to be the very thing that is born – the “deafening manytongued terrifying” voice of the children, which appears to enact the frantic cry of new born babies. That is, the trope that is “born” here, despite its structure and role as a fetish, and despite the fact that it is the only entity that has

⁷⁸ Perhaps the very disintegration, manifested in an apocalyptic vision at the end of the novel, indicates teleological impulses. As Teresa Heffernan claims, apocalypse, understood as revelation, lies behind the teleological narrative of modern nationalism: „Apocalypse continues to be understood in a secular context as a revelation or unveiling (from the ancient Greek *apokalupsis*), and this paradigm underlies the nineteenth-century teleological narrative of modern nationalism, where the emergence of the nation is understood as the point of arrival for an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 6)” („Apocalyptic Narratives” 471).

⁷⁹ Saleem’s quasi-silent birth actually prefigures the birth of his son (who is actually not his son, just as he was not the real son of his parents), the representative of the second generation of midnight’s children, who does not utter a sound, and remains mute until he is three years old or so.

“witnessed” the “truth” of Saleem’s trauma, also resembles what Steven Connor calls the most profound manifestation of a disorderly, ventriloquial utterance, the direct antithesis of “sonorous omnipotence” of “the Word;”⁸⁰ the voice that acts as a semi-demonic noise, proceeding from the demon which has taken up residence” in the human body, producing a “voice that issues from the genitals or anus” (Connor 224).⁸¹

The very “place” where the noise is born, Saleem’s nose, is often compared to genitals in the text. Described as the “big cucumber” on Aadam Aziz face, which Saleem also inherits, and which is “wagging like the little one in [his] pajamas” (17), acting as the organ that contains “dynasties waiting inside it [. . .], like snot” (14), the nose indeed appears to perform the function of the male genital. Described from the beginning as a miraculous organ (as Tai said to Saleem’s grandfather, “[f]ollow your nose and you’ll go far” [17-18], as if the nose could serve as an adequate compass that orients the “bildung” of the helpless “heroes” in the novel), in this episode, the nose appears to embody a certain androgynous totality, reminiscent of the modern nation’s loss: besides acting as the phallus, it also becomes the womb, the very place where the voices are conceived and born, thus enacting both the masculine and the feminine, in a curious androgynous embrace.⁸² This miraculous birth seems to escape the division that the modern nation suffers, as if it managed to overcome the moment that tears the modern nation into two irreconcilable faces. Also, the androgynous embrace, in Francette

⁸⁰ Connor, similarly to Dolar, makes serious effort to delineate the differences between the apparently pure, sonorous voice, the source of “Logos,” and the demonic, ventriloquial underside, the voice that Derrida ignored when he famously declared that the voice is guilty of evoking a “metaphysics of presence”. Reading early Christian theology, he, similarly to Rushdie, describes the articulation of voice as a birth. See “The Ethics of the Voice.”

⁸¹ “This is the voice not as fire or light, but [. . .] ‘disorderly matter’: the cacophony or shit-voice, which is also, in hysterical approximation, the vagitus itself, the terrifying cry of birth that is at once the voice as the rending of a presence from the material genitals, and the voice of the genitals as a rending” (Connor 224-25).

⁸² For a gender-conscious analysis of *Midnight’s Children*, see Nalini Natarajan’s „Woman, Nation and Narration in *Midnight’s Children*.” Natarajan’s reading, however, though primarily concerned with the role of the female body in the national discourse, does not discuss the episode that I consider as the most crucial one in founding the national allegory in the novel. What she analyses is how the feminine body (the reproductive body giving birth to Saleem, the pregnant Amina saving Lifafa Das’s life with her very body, etc.) enacts the spectacle of motherhood and becomes the dream of a unified India. The discourse that she relies on and reads in(to) the novel (women as biological and cultural reproducers of the nation) is well-known in gender studies (Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Nayereh Tohidi, “‘Guardians of the Nation’: Women, Islam, and the Soviet Legacy of Modernization in Azerbaijan”; and so on).

Pacteau's words, "takes us to the limits of language" (62); no wonder that its child, the "noise," also performs such a curious journey. As Pacteau claims, androgyny is the very "technique" that attempts to counteract castration anxiety, which, again, draws a peculiar analogy between this phenomenon and the structure of the noise-fetish. The androgynous fantasy seems to function as a compensation for the loss of the belief in the "phallic mother": "The fantasy of the androgyne is also reminiscent of a more primitive imago of early childhood located prior to the recognition of sexual difference – the 'phallic' mother whom the child perceives as complete and autonomous" (71). The fantasy marks a desire to return to a pre-Oedipal, undifferentiated and androgynous sexuality, and thus escape sexual differentiation, the symbolic, as well as "the other." These categories become blurred and metamorphosed into the self in the androgynous embrace:

The wish for a reunion implies a state of self-sufficiency which recalls the auto-eroticism of early infancy, or perhaps more accurately the earlier *objectless* stage at the dawn of consciousness, and further back the plenitude of intra-uterine life. To regain this state of self-sufficiency would imply the abolition of the other who constantly evokes the difference, the loss. (68)

That is, androgyny functions as the only state that is not threatened by the gaze of "the other," since the other does not exist for the androgyne, it is not differentiated from the self; therefore, it is a self-sufficient, pre-lapsarian state that is not threatened by the ultimate pain and loss that the recognition of "the other" institutes.

This seamless and harmonious androgynous fantasy,⁸³ which promises to make up even for the “mistakes” of the modern nation, attempting to counteract the gesture of tearing apart its masculine and feminine faces, acts as a momentary challenge of the pedagogical-symbolic discourse in Rushdie’s novel. Yet *Midnight’s Children* does not simply enact the modern nation’s very fantasy, the androgynous totality; it also endows this totality with subjectivity, devoid of the rigid gender categories that defined the modern nation. After the androgynous birth, with the new-born metaphor, the text attempts to insert into the discourse of the nation exactly that kind of subjectivity which both the modern canon and the pedagogical-symbolic speech interpellating Saleem have erased.

Despite the recurring bastard sons in the novel, the “child” of the nose seems to be a “proper sibling.” Differing only in one letter from his father/mother, it is the noise that attempts to reinsert the personal pronoun into the “nose,” into the text, and into the discourse of the nation as well. After Saleem realizes that his voices do not come from archangels, but signal the existence of midnight’s children, the first message that the children actually transmit acts as a reassertion of their (and his) subjectivity:

I heard, beneath the polyglot frenzy in my head, those other precious signals, utterly different from everything else, most of them faint and distant, like far-off drums whose insistent pulsing eventually broke through the fish-market cacophony of my voices.... those secret, nocturnal calls, like calling out to like.... The unconscious beacons of the children of midnight, signalling nothing more than their existence, transmitting simply: ‘I.’ From far to the North, ‘I.’ And the South East West: ‘I.’ ‘I.’ ‘And I’. (168)

⁸³ Several critics have investigated the harmonious wholeness that the fantasy of the androgyne designates, most famously, perhaps, Carolyn Heilbrun. As she claims, “[a]ndrogyny suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes; it suggests, further, a full range of experience open to individuals who may as women, be aggressive, as men, tender; it suggests a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom” (x).

The schizophrenic state that enabled Saleem to articulate the noise-metaphor seems to give way to a profound vision of transcendence at this point: “below the surface transmissions [. . .] language faded away, and was replaced by universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcended words” (168). The articulation of the I, the Self, then, just like the androgynous fantasy, presupposes the fading away of language, which the “noise” already induced, and the personal pronouns in this passage perform. It seems that the newly “born” allegory attempts to avoid the reinsertion of the symbolic into its vision at all costs; the symbolic has to fade away below the surface of transmissions, so that the performative allegory can find its space beyond the pedagogical national discourse. The subject that is born in this process seems to be beyond language, the symbolic, and the pedagogical, occupying a curious blind spot, a contradictory and ambivalent “third space,” in Homi Bhabha’s words, though apparently less radical than such spaces in Bhabha’s theory.

Perhaps it fails exactly for this reason. The androgynous wholeness, the only space where subject and performative nation *hide* (unlike according to Bhabha, who claims that the performative performs a profound challenge⁸⁴) commits, furthermore, two fatal mistakes. First, it will be unfaithful to its very origin: its traumatic and dirty birth, strangely interwoven with the very nature of the transcendental fantasy, simply becomes forgotten, and this forgetting, quite tragically, also does away with transcendence, androgyny, as well as with the performative vision of the nation itself. Second, there are certain flaws in the very instance when the metaphor becomes instituted; the structure of the androgynous construction itself, which promises to challenge the rigid categories of the modern nation, hides a number of blind-spots. I will discuss both of these flaws, which indeed illuminate why the postmodern nation remains only a promise, in the next section.

⁸⁴ In Bhabha’s theories, the performative always enacts a radical challenge: “The performative intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation’s *self-generation* by casting a shadow *between* the people as ‘image’ and its signification as a differentiating sign of Self, distinct from the Other of the Outside” (147-48).

Voice and Sound

Let us first take a look at the genealogy of the noise metaphor and its desperate attempt to forget its very origin. The trope that Saleem finally articulates seems to be a “blind metaphor,” defined by de Man as a trope that “presents as certain what is, in fact, a mere possibility” (*Allegories* 151); or, in other words, a trope that, if it means anything at all, seems to be referring to the very indeterminacy of its own meaning.⁸⁵ First, the metaphor seems to be evoking the entire scenario involved in its very birth: Saleem’s fear, a totally subjective experience, which explains why he perceives the voices as “deafening manytongued terrifying”; the act of naming results from Saleem’s ecstatic state of mind, hardly relying on any “objective facts,” since, as it later turns out, the voices of the children are not terrifying at all, but become, after a little effort paid by Saleem, intelligible speech (as the passage quoted above also indicates). Also, the metaphor seems to have no clue as to what it names: Saleem is not aware of the children’s existence yet, thus the “noise” seems to evoke no referent except for the vague image of the crying new-born child. The “Midnight’s Children’s Conference,” the children’s nightly democratic assembly, will become the metaphor’s vehicle, while the Indian nation will act as its tenor, but Saleem is far from being aware of these at this stage. The “noise” that he hears is perhaps the ground of comparison at its best, but it is not yet aware of the things that it compares. The metaphor seems to be endowed with nothing at this stage, apart from a subjective meaning in the de Manian sense, which is “fear.”

⁸⁵ De Man discusses a short allegorical episode of Rousseau’s *Essay on the Origin of Language*, which tells of a primitive man, who, when encountering an apparently strong and terrifying man, calls him “giant.” According to de Man, the metaphor does not really refer to the size of the man, but rather expresses fear, and “Giant!” thus stands for “I am afraid!”. As it later turns out, this fear was unfounded: after encountering several other men, the primitive man realizes that they are not stronger or bigger than he is. After this, he starts calling them “man.” The giant-metaphor is based on an error, but this error is honest, since the fear was honest: “the metaphor is blind not because it distorts objective data, but because it presents as certain what is, in fact, a mere possibility” (*Allegories* 151), thus literalizing “its referential indetermination into a specific unit of meaning” (*Allegories* 153).

After its birth, the trope performs a pilgrimage: it is looking for a tenor, a plausible meaning, and for a vehicle, a concrete, conceivable image. The first meaning that it finds is a transcendental, religious one: Saleem thinks that he can hear the voices of archangels, which he proudly announces to his family: “I heard voices yesterday. Voices are speaking to me inside my head. I think – Ammi, Abboo, I really think – that Archangels have started to talk to me” (164). The blow he gets from his father after his revelation, which makes him unable to hear properly in his left ear all through his life, makes him renounce his role as a Prophet, and he immediately starts looking for a new meaning of the noise. At this point he realizes that his voices, far from being sacred, are “as profane, and as multitudinous, as dust” (168), and instead of the sublime messages transmitted through Archangels, what he hears are “the inner monologues of all so-called teeming millions, of masses and classes alike” (168). Nevertheless, despite the profane nature of the voices, and the loss of “Archangelic heights,” Saleem’s voices seem to have preserved their transcendental nature: they transmit “thought-forms which far *transcended* words [. . .], the unconscious *beacons* of the children of midnight” (168, emphases added). Both the transcendence involved in the transmissions as well as the beacon metaphor suggest that Saleem’s voices, despite their mundane nature, have managed to preserve the semi-religious transcendence of Archangelic utterances (which is, obviously, a rhetoric that appeals to national discourses to a great extent).

Finally, Saleem discovers the existence of the children on his tenth birthday, due to a bicycle accident. He wants to show off his skills to the American Evie Burns, the girl he admires for her mastery of all kinds of bicycles, but, in fact, he is cycling for the first time in his life, and, unable to find the brake, crashes into his friend, Sonny Ibrahim. This accident, following the one in the washing chest, brings the miracle of midnight to completion; similarly to the previous accident, Saleem’s head is injured (“Sonny’s head greeted mine” [187]), as if the head, the symbol of rationality and the thinking Cogito, had to be

transgressed, violated, so that the miraculous vision could be born (no wonder that Padma, the principle of materialism returns only after the second accident, at the very beginning of the next chapter⁸⁶). The Midnight Children's Conference is born as a completion of a chain of accidents that persistently deny all traces of rationality and self-consciously shortcut any attempts to reinsert rational judgement.

With the birth of the conference, the "blind metaphor" seems to have found the vehicle it was looking for: we see a conference room, a "parliament chamber" (298), an image that gives shape to formlessness and completes the "freezing of hypothesis into fiction". This "parliamentary chamber," however, is not the missing vehicle of the noise metaphor: "nothing but trouble outside my head, nothing but *miracles* inside it" (207, emphasis added), writes Saleem, signalling that the "terrifying noise" has become a miracle. Fear, its original "subjective" meaning, has disappeared, similarly to the dirty and sinful scenario that surrounded its birth, as well as the memory of the two painful accidents. When the performative allegory of the nation acquires a form, a shape, its very founding metaphor seems to have diminished: the dirty washing chest disappears, as well as the fear and terror that led to its very articulation, as if the trope had forgotten that it originates in guilt and transgression. It seems that the metaphor has been purified during its search for meaning.

This is perhaps the biggest mistake that the performative discourse of the nation is guilty of. Forgetting its very genealogy, the "noise" wants to become a miraculous "voice," a pure and sonorous utterance: when Saleem claims that "'I heard voices yesterday. Voices are speaking to me inside my head. I think – Ammi, Abboo, I really think – that Archangels have started to talk to me'" (164), he is already guilty of purifying the noise, sanctifying and

⁸⁶ Padma's absence also coincides with the period of Saleem's illness. Padma, desperate to make his "other pencil" work, brings various herbs of fertility for him, which poison Saleem and cause a frenetic stiffness accompanied by a blubbing mouth (which, again, indicates the uncontrolled, potent, yet poisonous nature of the accidents narrated during this period). When Padma returns, after the "birth" of the "noise" metaphor, Saleem seems to be cured of his illness as well: "Padma is back. And now that I have recovered from the poison and am at my desk again, is too overwrought to be silent" (192).

harmonizing dissonance, since, in this way, the painful yet miraculous subjectivity involved in this discourse, the very subjectivity that the androgynous birth created, starts to disappear, and the performative allegory gradually becomes transformed into an image that is not very far from those that the pedagogical discourse has produced. The voice attempts to be perfect, just like Saleem's empty imago in the mirror, identified by the prime minister as representative of India, and this desire gradually moves the discourse of the performative nation towards pedagogical realms.

The difference between "sound" (or noise) and "voice" captures the subtle dividing line between these discourses, which is also the dividing line between the pedagogical and the performative discourses of the nation. It is exactly this disparity through which we can grasp the main difference between Bhabha's theory and Rushdie's novel: when Bhabha claims that "[i]n 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" (145), he postulates the pedagogical and the performative as two antithetical categories, which are quite clearly delineated, "militant," and, apparently, not prone to metamorphosing into each other. In Rushdie's novel, and not just in *Midnight's Children*, but in *The Satanic Verses* as well, these terms become less sterile; the performative vision, born as a semi-articulate and blind metaphor, becomes transformed into self-conscious and comprehensible voice: a trope which, unlike the noise, evokes the Derridean notion of logos in Rushdie's texts; the voice that teaches, the voice that is perhaps too sure of what it means.

In Rushdie's fiction, the difference between these terms lies in a subtle dividing line that allows the intrusion of the symbolic into the midnight's children's discourse: after the semi-articulate and transcendent "I" starts to designate the Indian nation, the miraculous community also falls apart:

The gradual disintegration of the Midnight's Children's Conference – which finally fell apart on the day the Chinese armies came down over the Himalayas to humiliate the Indian fauj – was already well under way. [. . .] Up in Kashmir, Narada-Markandaya was falling into the solipsistic dreams of the true narcissist, concerned only with the erotic pleasures of sexual alterations [. . .] And the sisters from Baud were content with their ability to bewitch fools young and old. 'What can this Conference help?' they inquired. 'We already have too many lovers'." (254)

When the transcendental signals of the "I" become transformed into intelligible speech, the "sound" replaced by the self-conscious "voice," the disintegration becomes unavoidable. According to Saleem, this is due to a loss that the symbolic world imposes upon the community: "If there is a third principle, its name is childhood. But it dies; or rather, it is murdered" (256). The text postulates childhood and "sound" as pre- or semi-symbolic states, whereas "voice" appears to act as the self-conscious, "proprietary" notion that Steven Connor defines as "the sign of a person's self-belonging, as that which cleaves most closely to and emanates most unfalsifiably from the self [. . .]" (227). In other words, voice designates a self-conscious and almost militant manifestation of identity, exactly that dimension which Derrida famously criticised in his attack upon Western phonocentrism,⁸⁷ yet both Rushdie and Connor postulate an "alternative voice," the noise, or sound, which acts as a dirty, devilish, disarticulate, paradoxically pre-symbolic entity, and which attempts to counteract Derrida's notion of the metaphysical voice as well as the pedagogical allegory of the nation in

⁸⁷ Connor also refers to Derrida when he discusses the "proprietary voice." As he argues, despite Derrida's attack upon Western phonocentrism, we need to reassert the voice as the self's ideal object, as an entity that is separate from the person who articulates it, yet also remains its "property" (therefore proprietary): "Modern technologies of the voice at once intensify the separability of the voice from the person of which it is supposed to be the indissoluble evidence and provide the physical means to substitute the phantasmic and metaphorical conception of the voice as a kind of property. A clear parallel suggests itself with the reparative operations of philosophical theories of the voice: the acknowledgement of the separability of the voice from the person consequent upon Derrida's assault upon the phonocentric prejudices of the West both leads to and seems to require the ethical sealing of the compact between the voice and the person, the reassertion of the voice as the self's ideal object or emanation" (227-28).

Rushdie's novels. It is this voice that, in David Appelbaum's words, performs the civilizing powers of speech, since it "proposes a radical distinction between the civilizing, anthropomorphic power of rational speech, and the primordial, inhuman powers of prephonemic voice, the voice that manifests itself in coughing, laughing and babbling. 'To speak', he concludes, 'is... to effect the decline of voice.'" (quoted in Connor 231). The tension between these two aspects of the voice, the inarticulate sound, the "not yet speech"⁸⁸ and the sonorous, pure voice, illuminates how Rushdie's fiction attempts to narrate a performative, postmodern nation.

Another episode that illuminates the difference between "sound" and "voice" is the one that tells about the short career of India's promise, the Hummingbird.⁸⁹ Mian Abdullah, the Hummingbird, founder and chairman of the Free Islam Convocation, advocates an alternative that the text again locates around the trope of the "noise": called "optimism disease" by Saleem's grandfather, who is continuously whistling as a demonstration of his having caught the virus, Abdullah's Convocation aims at founding a peaceful and moderate community for the Muslim population of India. His continuous humming already evokes an inarticulate, "demonic" noise, just like Aadam Aziz's whistling, suggesting that alternative communities are centred around this subversive trope in the novel. Abdullah's followers, the optimists, are called "expert ventriloquists" (45): "Abdullah had the strange habit of humming without a pause, humming in a strange way, neither musical nor unmusical, but somehow mechanical, the hum of an engine or dynamo [. . .] (46)." The episode also underlines the fact that this noise, despite its dirty and underground nature and its manifestation as an instance of

⁸⁸ As Connor argues, this is how Appelbaum and Lyotard conceptualize voice: "where the voice is always-already speech for Levinas and Chr tien, for Appelbaum and Lyotard, it is always-already *not yet speech*" (232).

⁸⁹ Teresa Heffernan reads this episode and the Hummingbird's community, together with that of Picture Singh, the magician, as allegories of the Islamic nation, the umma, which, unlike the modern Western nation, aiming to protect individual freedom, promotes the idea of a universal community. However, I argue that Rushdie's "magic" communities centred around the "noise" are always more keen on reinstituting a certain subjectivity, however transcendent and collective (the unconscious beacons of midnight's children) than promoting a community that "discounts the particulars of location or historical circumstance" (481). Also, the magic ghetto of Picture Singh, clearly associated with communism, the "red disease," etc, can hardly be regarded as the manifestation of the Islamic umma.

“ventriloquism,” or, perhaps, exactly because of this, acts as an entity that promises an alternative, similarly to the guilty noise that Saleem discovers in the washing chest.

In *Midnight's Children*, the most obvious manifestation of “Voice” is the singing of Saleem’s sister, Jamila. After the family moves to Pakistan, for political reasons, they discover the talent of the fifteen-year-old girl, previously called the “Brass Monkey”. Her real name was so much overshadowed by the Monkey in her that Saleem has not even mentioned it before; it is only in this episode that she becomes transformed into “Jamila Singer,” and her new name already indicates that, similarly to the “noise” of midnight’s children, her Monkey-self becomes replaced by a new image that is not quite faithful to its own genealogy. She becomes a national hero, “‘Pakistan’s Angel,’ ‘The Voice of the Nation,’ the ‘Bulbul-e Din’ or nightingale of the faith” (313), and, unlike the hesitant “sound” that founded the children’s allegory, her voice speaks about “blind and blinding devoutness” (314) and “right or wrong nationalism” (314). Like Saleem, she also becomes addressed by the President, entitling her to act as the official representative of the Pakistani nation: “‘Jamila daughter,’ we heard, ‘your voice will be a sword for purity; it will be a weapon with which we shall cleanse men’s souls’” (315). She becomes “a superhuman being, [. . .] an angel who sang to her people all days and nights” (314); her golden voice is on “Voice-Of-Pakistan Radio” (314) all the time, literally replacing the “unconscious beacons of the children of midnight” (168) that “All India Radio” transmitted. As Saleem writes, “[m]y nose, her voice: they were exactly complementary gifts; but they were growing apart” (315): his nose, the instinctual container of the noise and the androgynous organ that gives birth to the self, becomes substituted by the pure, sonorous, public, self-conscious, singing Voice that is completely separated from the body of its producer, who is turned into an angel, a superhuman, incorporeal being.

Obviously, these two allegories also implicate extratextual references, Saleem's noise acting as an allegory of India, whereas Jamila's voice as that of Pakistan.⁹⁰ (Her allegory already foreshadows how *Shame*, the novel published two years after *Midnight's Children*, imagines Pakistan as a pedagogical, artificial, self-consciously created nation.) Yet these tropes also speak about alternative national discourses, the "complementary gifts" (315) of "no(i)se" and "voice," the performative and the pedagogical visions of the nation, and it is certainly not true that India is endowed with a miraculous performativity whereas Pakistan becomes condemned as a pedagogical venture in the text; as we have seen, the body allegory addresses Saleem as the mirror of India in spectacularly pedagogical ways. The text, besides commenting on extratextual events, also seems to be interested in exploring these *alternative modes of speech*.

The "birth" of Jamila's allegory suggests a strong parallel between her "golden voice" (313) and Saleem's accidental "noise." First, her story seems to be revolving around a perforated sheet, which also acts as Saleem's talisman, and recalls the dirty sheets he had found in the washing chest before the children's "noise" invaded his head. Jamila's family, unwilling to put the body of their beloved daughter on the stage "in front of God knows how many strange men" (312), needs the help of Uncle Puffs, who comes up with a brilliant strategy that helps to make their daughter famous without revealing her face. He devises an all-concealing, white silk chadar, with a three-inch hole cut in the middle, which literally becomes the replica of Saleem's talisman, the perforated sheet through which his grandfather had first glimpsed the body of his wife: "Jamila sang with her lips pressed against the brocaded aperture, [and] Pakistan fell in love with a fifteen-year-old girl whom it only ever glimpsed through a gold-and-white perforated sheet" (313). Just like Saleem's "noise," her "voice" is singing from a secret place, yet whereas Saleem discovered the children among

⁹⁰ For the discussion of the ambiguous balance *Midnight's Children* creates between being self-referential and evoking extratextual events, see the analysis of Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, especially chapter 10 (on *Midnight's Children*).

dirty sheets and used underwear, Jamila is standing behind a silk chadar, “heavily embroidered in gold brocade-work and religious calligraphy” (313), which literally cuts her voice off the body that produces it. In contrast with Saleem’s noise, which was the very locus of subjectivity, the miraculous birth of a collective self, her Voice emerges as an entirely disembodied, incorporeal, free-floating, angelic entity.

Jamila’s disembodied voice, though it appears as a free-floating, superhuman entity, is one of the best instances of what Connor calls the “proprietary voice.” Its proprietor is, however, not the singing girl, but the collective national “we” that “fills” her voice with reference: when the Pakistani president claims that “your voice will be a sword for purity; it will be a weapon with which we shall cleanse men’s souls” (315), he literally appropriates the trope as a militant, pure, and religious metaphor, filling it with a meaning that is supposed to radiate from behind the heavily embroidered “perforated sheet.” Perhaps the voice splits, similarly to the body, exactly because it is prone to become appropriated, because its “proprietary” nature allows for the accumulation of all kinds of references, an abundance of meanings and proprietors. Therefore the harmonious, sonorous, and perfect voice acts as the exact replica of Saleem’s face in the mirror: after the perfect body now we encounter the perfect voice, as if the pedagogical discourse indeed aimed at creating a three-dimensional being in the novel, enacting the best known strategies of modernist discourses when endowing Saleem with the role of embodying India’s future and putting “angelic” Jamila behind the veil of decency. This image, in both cases, while postulating an untouchable and perfect imago, the empty Cogito of the modern nation, entirely lacks any kind of subjectivity, similarly to the modernist discourse of the nation from Gellner to Anderson. Also, interestingly, by instituting a male body and a female voice, the image attempts to create an androgynous totality, yet this androgyne, nevertheless, remains a deceptive image, which is part of the modernist legacy, since it is utterly devoid of any traces of subjectivity.

Quite in contrast with Connor, who regards the disarticulate voice as a demonic entity that possesses the self, in Rushdie, the promise of subjectivity, and, therefore, of the “postmodern nation,” lies exactly in this accidental and dirty entity. The difference is quite striking: according to Connor, we live in an age of “resumed demonology” (234), which means that we become “possessed by voices, desires, agencies which are neither our own, nor can be assigned a name and substantial identity in the world” (234).⁹¹ In Rushdie, however, though Saleem is also literally possessed by the children’s voices, it is always the pure and perfect entities that become filled by pedagogical-symbolic references, while the semi-articulate and semi-conscious “demonic” remains a promise, at least as long as it does not start to metamorphose into the pedagogical.

As for this hesitant promise of subjectivity, which would also guarantee the challenge of the pedagogical nation, it fails for two reasons. First, as I have already indicated, the “noise” metaphor’s profound unfaithfulness to its own genealogy, its overwhelming desire to become pure and sonorous, lets the symbolic intrude into its structures, and, as we have seen, the symbolic, whether understood in a Lacanian or Paul de Manian sense, acts as the strategy of the pedagogical national discourse.⁹² Second, the performative, semi-articulate, pre-symbolic and androgynous state itself hides a number of blind spots, which it stubbornly refuses to face. These blind spots do not only lie in the fact that the androgyne proudly

⁹¹ As Connor claims, “[o]ur contemporary condition might be said to be that of a resumed demonology. The demoniality developed by the early Church Fathers, especially Tertullian, Origen and Augustine, was a form of exorcistic knowledge. However swarmingly multitudinous they might be, the demons could always be known and shown, made to confess their names and occupations. In contemporary demonology, however, the demon cannot be named and located. We inhabit a condition in which we are visited, traversed and even possessed by voices, desires, agencies which are neither our own, nor can be assigned a name and substantial identity in the world. Pierre Klossowski has explained that the most important feature of a demon is its non-being. The demon borrows us for its purpose, the purpose of affirming non-being against being, but can only do so because our bodies, our words, our artefacts, provide it with form” (234). In *Midnight’s Children*, exactly the other way round, it is Saleem’s body and Jamila’s voice that are “possessed,” alienating both of their bodies from the pure and clear references they are endowed with, whereas the demonic noise of the children “possessing” Saleem provides his otherwise empty body with a temporary subjectivity, however devoid of reference.

⁹² I have not dealt with Lacan’s definition of the symbolic in more detail, since, unlike de Man’s argument, it is quite well known. His main point is that language constitutes the unconscious, subjectivity and the symbolic order, and that the subject, in order to achieve meaning, has to give up an organic totality. See “Field and Function of Speech and Language” in *Écrits*, 30-114.

ignores the presence of the “other” in the “noise” (the presence which will eventually lead to its demise: Shiva, Saleem’s greatest enemy, the proper son of midnight, named after the god of destruction, whom Saleem deprives of his birthright, takes revenge on the children’s conference), but also in its very nature, and in the very instance when it becomes instituted in the novel. Several critics claim that despite its promise, the androgyne is “guilty” of reinstituting gender relations that are far less “liberating” than they appear to be;⁹³ in my view, this is exactly what happens in Rushdie’s novel as well.

First, the role of Saleem’s mother in the scenario remains that of the spectacle: the feminine that signifies *lack*. The noise metaphor, through its androgynous birth, attempts to counteract this apparently “originary” condition. The sight of his mother’s body, who also becomes a sinful Eve in this postmodern creation story, simply triggers off the events, while Saleem is busy with the act of creation, and this is indeed what we witness, a peculiar creation of the wor(l)d. However hesitantly and perhaps despite his own will, Saleem acts as the creator, embodying, in Carole Pateman’s words, “the procreative power of a father who is complete in himself, who embodies the creative power of both female and male. His procreative power both gives and animates physical life and creates and maintains political right” (87). This “mistake” is often committed by androgynous constructions; the balance between their poles, which promises the reversal of gender roles, is upset by the masculine’s unrelenting desire to appropriate the entire construction for himself.⁹⁴ The two poles seem to

⁹³ As Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi claims in “The Politics of Androgyny,” “[r]evolutionary theories of the androgyne worked out by men – even when those ally themselves with the feminist cause – time and again have a vision of the first sort of androgyny, the masculine completed by the feminine, but not of the second, the feminine completed by the masculine. In fact, these theories in utter and almost laughable unconsciousness simply take for granted woman’s inferiority [. . .]” (quoted in Attebery, *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction*, 132-33). Even Pacteau, who apparently does not share Gelpi’s feminist concerns and claims that “[t]he androgynous ‘position’ represents a denial, or a transgression, of the rigid gender divide, and as such implies a threat to our given identity and to the system of social roles which define us” (63), argues that this position exists as such only in the imaginary; as soon as it becomes represented, the image loses its “revolutionary potential”: “the image does not exist outside the symbolic; it is irremediably caught up between the feminine and the masculine. Representation of the androgynous ‘in between’ is an impossibility” (81).

⁹⁴ This is also the “mistake” Gelpi refers to when she claims that the androgynous “vision,” while imagining the feminine completing the masculine, often fails to take account of the second possibility: the feminine completed by the masculine (quoted in Attebery 132).

collide in a gesture that promises an undivided wholeness, and which, for a moment, seems to cure the torn, irrevocably split faces of the modern nation, yet, instead of a genuine challenge, only leads towards implosion (which is a danger inherent in the androgyne). This happens, perhaps, because the terms themselves are not changed; the very categories employed are not altered: the feminine simply serves as a spectacle, the lack against which the apparently androgynous construction is created, quite like in Lacan's theory,⁹⁵ and the androgyne itself is too overtly defined by a desire to appropriate the "whole" (akin to Saleem's "urge to encapsulate the whole of reality" [75]). The implosion is, therefore, unavoidable, since *the very terms themselves are incompatible with the self- and gender-conscious argument of the text*, and this is also one of the reasons why there is a profound gap between the "political unconscious" of the novel and the "intended message," which is never devoid of political correctness.

In a way, this is the very scenario that becomes repeated in the act of narrating the novel: Saleem, the creator, urged to "encapsulate the whole of reality," narrates his autobiography to Padma, the female listener, named after the "Dung Goddess".⁹⁶ As if intending to bring back the dirt involved in the miracle of the washing chest, writing also becomes "shitting" (as Padma puts it: "what is so precious [. . .] to need all this writing-

⁹⁵ Kaja Silverman criticises Lacan's theories exactly for this reason: Lacan assumes that women represent lack in the symbolic, and, for that reason, they remain outside signification and relatively less defined by the symbolic order. According to Silverman, such an assumption is preposterous: "It is preposterous to assume either that woman remains outside of signification, or that her sexuality is any less culturally organized or repressed than that of her male counterpart. If the entry into language is understood as effecting an automatic breach with the real – and the Lacanian argument is very persuasive on this point – then the female subject's linguistic inauguration must be seen as locating her, too, on the side of meaning rather than being. She makes the same 'sacrifice' as does the male subject, a sacrifice which cannot be localized in the way suggested by Lacan" (189).

⁹⁶ Several critics read Padma's figure as the epitome of the sexist nature of the novel. According to Heffernan, "Padma, to whom Saleem tells his tale, remains on the periphery of Saleem's story. Her comments are available to the reader but are never incorporated into Saleem's narrative" (482). Or, as Charu Verma claims, Padma's tragedy is that her story is not incorporated into the male narrative ("Padma's Tragedy"). Even Brennan remarks that "there is something offensive about the way Rushdie often depicts women, beginning with the images of Padma as *Bharat Mata* and continuing more clearly in the strangely demeaning characterisations of *The Satanic Verses*" (126).

shiting?” [24]), a dirty yet fertile act, similarly to Padma’s very name.⁹⁷ By evoking dirt, it seems that Saleem is trying to move his narrative, the “novel of the nation,” towards performative grounds, which is also closely intertwined with his desire to regain the subjectivity involved in the “noise,” the very “I” that pedagogical-symbolic constructions constantly attempt to (over)write.⁹⁸ This grandiose project would indeed guarantee a challenge of pedagogy, and a genuine vision of a performative nation, supporting Bhabha’s arguments. Yet since this story seems to replicate the structures of the one that enfolds in the very narrative centred around the accident in the washing chest, producing quite similar positions of male and female, creator and spectacle/listener, no matter how critical this latter category is, the promise and possibility of intervention remain greater than the actual challenge.

⁹⁷ Saleem, to conciliate Padma for his remarks about her name, inserts a “brief paecan to Dung” into his narrative: “Dung, that fertilizes and causes the crops to grow! Dung, which is patted into thin chapatti-like cakes when still fresh and moist, and is sold to the village builders, who use it to secure and strengthen the walls of kachacha buildings made of mud! Dung, whose arrival from the nether end of cattle goes a long way towards explaining their divine and secret status! Oh, yes, I was wrong, I admit I was prejudiced, no doubt because its unfortunate odours do have a way of offending my sensitive nose – how wonderful, how ineffably lovely it must be to be names after the Purveyor of Dung!” (32)

⁹⁸ For the analysis of Saleem’s attempt to regain his self through writing see Tamás Bényei’s “Szalim könyve” in *Aporkif iratok*, especially 288-298.

The Lack:

Shame

The plenitude that *Midnight's Children* promises, loses, or, perhaps, simply gets wrong, seems to be absent in *Shame*. Or, more precisely, it seems to be the sole possession of the "Other," the one who is outside the imagined community; the one in opposition to whom the very community is defined. Instead of miraculous "noises," we encounter lack and silence, and instead of the masculine allegories of midnight's children, in this novel, women seem to rule. Their reign, however, is somewhat dubious, considering the fact that women, unlike Saleem, are not responsible for the fate of the hesitant-yet-miraculous, dirty-yet-fertile allegory of India, but, instead, their narrative revolves around a profound *lack*. Therefore, I argue that even though the novel gives more space for gender-conscious analyses,⁹⁹ it is far from imagining a genuinely performative nation that finally provides a space for women, which is different from those assigned by pedagogical discourses. On the other way round:

⁹⁹ *Shame* has been read by several critics from the perspective of gender studies. Brennan, for instance, claims that it is a "feminist" novel: "in *Shame* women are the key to his political analysis in a number of ways, for the very reason that, as Thomas Lippman points out, 'there is probably no issue that has more unfavorably influenced the Western world's image of Islam or more preoccupied lawmakers in Moslem countries than the status of women.' It is an analysis that consequently declares itself feminist in the text of the novel itself: 'Repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repressions of other kinds as well....'" (126). In this instance, however, I think, we are witnessing, once again, a profound gap between the self-conscious declarations of the text and its "political unconscious": women remain deprived of ever possessing the kind of "noise" Saleem "discovered," no matter how intolerable the narrator considers their oppression. See also Inderpal Grewal, "Salman Rushdie: Marginality, Women, and *Shame*" in *Reading Rushdie*.

this text even gives up the attempt to institute a feminine alternative to Saleem's hesitant "noise."

Of course, just like in the case of *Midnight's Children*, there are explanations for this that reside outside the text. *Shame* allegorizes Pakistan, a nation that Rushdie regarded as an artificial construction, torn apart by political corruption, as he claims in the interviews he gave, and as it appears in several essay-like passages of the novel as well.¹⁰⁰ No wonder that the novel dedicated to this country remains darker, more devoid of promises than the one about India. This fact is often mentioned by Rushdie's critics; Brennan, for instance, claims that *Shame*, compared to *Midnight's Children*, "is simply meaner, seedier, a bad joke" (123),¹⁰¹ while Aijaz Ahmad accuses the novel of leaving no room for resistance.¹⁰² Several Indian scholars go even further and claim that Rushdie had no right to write about Pakistani matters at all. Authors of a collection of critical essays published in New Delhi unanimously accuse Rushdie of "distorting" real events and of creating a false, dark, bitter version of

¹⁰⁰ As the narrator, quite ironically, claims, he is not really writing a realistic novel about Pakistan, since that novel, unlike his once-upon-a-time fairy tale, would have to recount innumerable instances of corruption: „But suppose this were a realistic novel! Just think what else I might have to put in. The business, for instance, of the illegal installation, by the richest inhabitants of 'Defence,' of covert, subterranean water pumps that steal water from their neighbours' mains [. . .] And I also would have to describe the Sind Club in Karachi, where there is still a sign reading 'Women and Dogs Not Allowed Beyond This Point'?" (71). Comments such as these indicate the attitude *Shame* takes towards the Pakistani nation and its treatment of women.

¹⁰¹ As Brennan writes, *Shame* is darker since the ambivalence inherent in *Midnight's Children* is substituted by mockery: "[a]s if in response to the unacceptability of Pakistan's dim political prospects, the historical 'two-sidedness' or ambivalence of *Midnight's Children* resurfaced in *Shame* as historical pun. Its comic tyrants were so bitterly drawn that they induced only horror, and the comic relief Rushdie promised came primarily in the form of hopeless mockery on the verbal level, a willy-nilly distancing in a 'postmodern' mood of automatic, and humourless, parody" (119).

¹⁰² As Ahmad argues, *Shame* lacks "innumerable heroisms of both ordinary and extraordinary kinds" (139), and this explains why the novel remains dark and devoid of alternatives. According to him, the reason for this is that Rushdie, whom he never really considers to be different from the narrator of the novel, looks at the wrong "bits and pieces" of Pakistan: "Neither the class from which the Pakistani segment of his experience derived, nor the ideological ensemble within which he has located his own affiliations, admits, in any fundamental degree, the possibility of heroic action [. . .]. What this excludes – 'the missing bits' – to which one must reconcile himself – is the dailiness of lives lived under oppression, and the human bonding – of resistance, of decency, of innumerable heroisms of both ordinary and extraordinary kinds – which makes it possible for a large number of people to look each other in the eye [. . .]" (139)

Pakistan in *Shame*.¹⁰³ Yet these arguments have nothing to say about why this particular lack becomes associated with women.

I argue that in *Shame*, the “secret” that the midnight’s children got wrong remains in the hands of the other, and this explains both the bleak, almost existentialist vision that unfolds in the novel, and the dominance of women, who become the embodiments of this profound lack. The performative “noise” of *Midnight’s Children* hardly ever surfaces in this bleak and “silent” world, and even when it does, it appears as a tantalizing, unreachable entity, which evokes envy and jealousy rather than the plenitude that Saleem momentarily possessed. There is no sound, and no magic in this novel, except in a very absurd, artificial context; therefore, the nation that it imagines remains a profoundly pedagogical entity, without any genuine performative alternative.

It is not only magic and sound that are missing from this text: *Shame* does not even attempt to introduce androgyny and challenge the bipolar, split world of the Pakistani nation. Rather, the novel continuously splits the subject, inverting any notion that emerges in the text into its exact opposite, leaving no middle ground, or third principle,¹⁰⁴ which *Midnight’s Children* identified as the locus of miracle, the only promise that leads towards androgyny. In this way, the novel deprives its imaginary nations exactly of that ambiguous dimension that brought the hesitant yet miraculous nation of *Midnight’s Children* to life, and the nation(s) that it imagines remain more akin to those imagined by the *modernist* discourse of nationalism studies. Therefore, through an inverted logic, the analysis of *Shame* also proves that the postmodern nation revolves around the trope of sound and androgyny in Rushdie’s fiction.

¹⁰³ G.R. Taneja, R.K. Dhawan (eds.), *The Novels of Salman Rushdie*. S. K. Tikoo, for instance, writes that Rushdie “selects his material from history, and then fantasizes it, and by doing so, converts Pakistan into something like *Peccavistan*. This is what he calls the palimpsest on the real, existing country” (52). O. P. Matur in the same collection also argues that “[t]he Pakistani reality is [. . .] very much there: it has only been tilted ‘at a slight angle’” (87).

¹⁰⁴ As the narrator of *Midnight’s Children* claims, after witnessing the disintegration of the children’s conference, “[i]f there is a third principle, its name is childhood. But it dies; or rather, it is murdered” (256).

The Lack

The opening scene of the novel already appears to be rather bleak: instead of the miraculous birth of Saleem, followed by the paradise-like vision of Kashmir that unfolds in the first chapters of *Midnight's Children*, in *Shame* we encounter death and utter isolation. The novel begins with the story of three sisters, introduced as three fairy queens living in a labyrinth-like mansion in a town called Q. Due to their father's tyrannical will, the mansion is completely isolated from the outside world: it appears to be a place outside time, as if the ghost of Miss Havisham from Dickens's *Great Expectations* had stopped the clocks in this mansion as well. The sisters are destined to live in such an everlasting present, without ever having a glimpse of the sun and the world that is beyond the mansion's gigantic walls. The mansion is described as an enchanted, almost unreal place, and its inhabitants, the three imprisoned mistresses, are introduced as fairy-queens: "In the remote border town of Q., which when seen from the air resembles nothing so much as an ill-proportioned dumb-bell, there once lived three lovely, and loving sisters" (*Shame* 3).¹⁰⁵ Yet instead of becoming "sleeping beauties," as Susan Oomen assumes,¹⁰⁶ isolation turns the three "lovely, and loving sisters" into vulture-like Gothic heroines, called either "three crazy sinful witches" (107), or "three crazy vultures" (310), thus fulfilling the "promise" already made in the opening scene.

The mansion is located exactly between the realm of the alien colonizers and the indigenous population, "equidistant from the bazaar and the Cantt" (4). The father, old Shakil, "loathed both worlds and had for many years remained immured in his high, fortress-like, gigantic residence [. . .]" (4). The opening scene, then, already evokes the scenario of

¹⁰⁵ In the subsequent references to *Shame* in this chapter I am only going to indicate the page numbers of the novel.

¹⁰⁶ According to Oomen, the story of the three sisters, calling the archetypal fairy tale, the Sleeping Beauty into the reader's mind, functions as a "once-upon-a-time fairy tale" (37), set in an "out-of-time world order" (37).

colonization, and the almost existentialist need to find a subject position in between the alternatives that it offers: the Cantt, the realm of colonizers, which becomes the other, the derided yet envied master, and the bazaar, the realm of the self, upon whom the gaze of the master falls. Old Shakil, unable to identify with the shaming colonizers and refusing to become the ashamed self, chooses isolation and shuts the doors of his mansion. It seems that the colonial situation leaves no option but a defensive hiding, a schizoid split between the alien other and the humiliated native self: the isolation of the mansion functions as a defence of the self, a willed blindness that attempts to repress and counteract the native's shame, the obvious consequence of the intruder's radiating pride.

The colonizers' pride is literally radiating in the novel: just across the street, opposing the isolated mansion, there is a shining Palladian hotel, called Hotel Flashman (reminding the reader of George Macdonald Fraser's Flashman novels), which acts as the metonymy of the colonizers' glittering gaze. The hotel, which "rose out of the intolerable Cantonment streets like a mirage" (4), becomes the sole target of old Shakil's frustrated anger: "The old man heard the music of the imperialists issuing from the golden hotel, heavy with the gaiety of despair, and he cursed the hotel of dreams in a loud, clear voice. 'Shut that window,' he shouted, so that I don't have to die listening to that racket' [. . .]" (4-5). The hotel acts as the metonymy of the frustrating other, and literally becomes a "golden dome," as if it symbolised the sun, the "eye of God" that watches and judges the self. It becomes the source of light, associated with energy, whiteness, and the realm of music, the source of an enchanting and magical sound: inside the hotel, we see "golden cuspidors and tame spider-monkeys in brass-buttoned uniforms and bellhop hats and a full-sized orchestra playing every evening in a stuccoed ballroom amidst an energetic riot of fantastic plants, yellow roses and white magnolias and roof-high emerald-green palms [. . .]" (4). The mansion, however, remains enveloped in darkness, blackness, and silence: a secluded, "enormous *silent* house" (106,

emphasis added), which faces “inwards to a well-like and lightless compound yard” (4), as if enacting the very antithesis of the golden and raucous hotel.

Old Shakil, of course, “loathes” the “music of the imperialists,” which he calls “racket” (that is, noise, uproar, cacophony), yet his daughters, the three sisters, whom Old Shakil keeps in house-arrest, imagine that it possesses a miraculous, tempting quality: “They spent their evenings seated at a window behind a lattice-work screen, looking towards the golden dome of the great hotel and swaying to the strains of the enigmatic dance music...” (5). The “music of the imperialists” becomes the sole alternative of Saleem’s miraculous noise: the music appears as the secret of the other, the secret that the self desires yet can never possess, similarly to the tempting light that emanates from the hotel. Sound and light become intertwined in this novel, and they both remain in the possession of the Other; both are perceived as derided yet desired secrets responsible for the temptation of the three sisters as well as their shame.

The light emanating from the golden hotel becomes a “shaming light” in the novel, which literally embodies shame, just as Jean-Paul Sartre argues. According to Sartre, the imaginary appearance of an absolute light plays a crucial role in this psychological notion: “shame is only the original feeling of having my being *outside*, engaged in another being and as such without any defense, illuminated by the absolute light which emanates from a pure subject” (312, emphasis in the original). Similarly to Sartre’s argument, Lacan also refers to a certain point of light when he imagines the place from which the other looks at the self: “It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated – and I am not speaking metaphorically” (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 95). Though Sartre writes about the effect of shame, whereas Lacan describes the “eternal” condition of the fallen subject, both envisage the other as the source of light that makes the

self fall into a helpless, paralyzed, shameful condition, similarly to the golden dome of the radiating hotel.

In Rushdie's novel, the three imprisoned girls, after years of being tempted by the siren song of colonizers, encounter this magic radiance only once in their life. After the death of their father, who passes away right on the first page of the novel, as if his death enacted the very antithesis of Saleem's birth in the beginning of *Midnight's Children*, already implicating that this novel takes *lack* as a starting point, the three girls decide to celebrate their freedom by throwing a party. The guest-list that they compile remains, however, heavily influenced by the siren song of the golden hotel: as if attempting to satisfy years of repressed desires, apart from a few non-white zamindars and their wives, they invite guests only from the radiating hotel of dreams. The colonizers and their music invade the silent mansion: "on the much anticipated evening, the old house was invaded by an army of musical geniuses, whose three-stringed dumdums, seven-stringed sarandas, reed flutes and drums filled that puritanical mansion with celebratory music for the first time in two decades [. . .]" (8). Furthermore, the invasion also casts the light of shame on the sisters, as if the shining-white masters literally enacted Sartre's vision of the shaming Other: "The imperialists! – the grey-skinned sahibs and their gloved begums! – raucous-voiced and *glittering with condescension*, they entered the mirrorworked marquee" (9, emphasis added). The mansion acts as the metonymy of the colonised Self, a lightless and dark body that is violated by the master,¹⁰⁷ who "brings the light," fulfilling his "civilizing mission": as it turns out, after the wild night spent with dancing and drinking, one of the girls had been put "into the family way" (9). After this

¹⁰⁷ This is not the only instance when spatial metaphors and the human body metamorphose into each other in the novel. When Iskander Harappa, Pakistani President, leader of the Popular Front, secretly has his cousin, Little Mir Harappa, murdered, the narrator seems to suggest that his deed is a revenge for a crime committed earlier by Little Mir, when he had ruthlessly looted his estate in Mohenjo. As a revenge, Iskander loots the body of Little Mir; we see the disembowelled body depicted on the shawls that Iskander's wife embroiders, the shawls that silently and secretly tell the truth about Iskander's "heroic acts": "she had delineated his body with an accuracy that stopped the heart, leaving out nothing, not the disembowelling, not the tear in the armpit through which Mir's own heart had been removed, not the torn-out tongue, nothing, and there was a villager standing beside the corpse, with his bewildered remark sewn in black above his head: 'It looks as if,' the fellow said, 'his body has been looted, like a house'" (214).

encounter, the sisters fall into an irretrievable and paralyzing shame: they lock the doors of the mansion and isolate themselves for their entire life, falling into a condition that even surpasses their father's paranoid measures.

The music of the "imperialists," the only sound that ever fills the puritanical and silent mansion, becomes threatening in the sisters' world: "the Shakil sisters clapped their hands in unison and ordered the musicians to start playing Western-style dance music, minutes, waltzes, fox-trots, polkas, gavottes, music that acquired a fatally demonic quality when forced out of the virtuosi's outraged instruments" (9). It seems that the enigmatic siren song of the golden hotel can only be translated into a distorted, demonic mishmash once it enters the sisters' realm; even though their very bodily movements enact the secret they desire, instead of a grand initiation, what they encounter is an infernal noise. Yet whereas in *Midnight's Children*, the dirty and underground noise promised to challenge pedagogical discourses, in *Shame*, the fatally demonic sound only speaks about the gap which results from the encounter of self and other; the gap that lies at the heart of the colonial encounter.¹⁰⁸ Also, whereas in *Midnight's Children* the noise produced in Saleem's nose appeared as an organic, natural entity, associated with bodily organs as well as the subject, here the distorted dance music "forced out of the virtuosi's outraged instruments" (9) is mechanical, artificial, produced by musical instruments, as if it were associated with the artifice of culture. Unlike in *Midnight's Children*, then, this noise is not related to a curious, magical, pre-symbolic dimension and a miraculous vision of an empowered subject, ready to intervene in official national discourses. Rather, it is the product of culture, the very symbolic world that Saleem's noise attempted to challenge. Therefore, whereas Saleem's noise, due to its pre-symbolic and magical nature,

¹⁰⁸ As Fanon argues, relying on the Hegelian categories, due to an inferiority complex that the native experiences, black girls often despise black man, since they despise their own black bodies, and desire the white master who might lead them away from the class of slaves to that of masters. Fanon also imagines the secret of the master as a certain light that he possesses, which he shares with the black woman in the moment of recognition: "Something remarkable must have happened on the day when the white man declared his love to the mulatto. There was recognition, incorporation into a group that had seemed hermetic. The psychological minus-value, this feeling of insignificance and its corollary, the impossibility of reaching the light, totally vanished. From one day to the next, the mulatto went from the class of slaves to that of masters" (58).

promises to subvert the symbolic-pedagogical vision of the nation, in *Shame* the infernal, mechanical sound of the Shakil sisters simply reiterates the lack that pervades the entire novel.

It is also interesting to note that this infernal, mechanical noise becomes associated with light in the novel, unlike in *Midnight's Children*, where the children's noise is "born" in the dark washing chest. It seems that the Shakil sisters are unable to find a hiding space that would enable them to come up with an alternative, a noise that would challenge the radiance of colonizers. Those empowering subject positions are always hidden in Rushdie's fiction, and they are also related to darkness, so it is no wonder that, once exposed to the sun, the sisters simply become grotesque versions of such a challenge. They believe that they overthrow years of paternal repression, but what they actually experience is nothing but the birth of a bizarre and artificial *nonsense*, which lies at the heart of the colonial encounter.

Instead of miraculous and productive hiding places, then, this novel offers empty and schizoid subject position. As we learn on the very first page, the sisters have never really possessed any kind of subjectivity; they do not even have a name:

Their names... but their real names were never used, like the best household china, which was locked away after the night of their joint tragedy in a cupboard whose location was eventually forgotten [. . .] the three sisters, I should state without further delay, bore the family name of Shakil, and were universally known (in descending order of age) as Chunni, Munnee and Bunny. (3)

The only "real" name that the sisters possess is the name of their father, who dies on the first page, and whose memory they attempt to erase all through their lives. We do not know anything about their mother, or their past: except for the three nonsensical names that they

acquired, they possess nothing, their selves are literally erased, locked away in a cupboard, whose location they eventually forget. The cupboard, unlike the washing chest in *Midnight's Children*, is not a hiding place that enables them to acquire magical abilities; exactly the other way round, this space simply deprives them of whatever remnants of subjectivity they have possessed. It is this lack and erasure that underlines their existence, which becomes, in Sartre's words, a "fall through absolute emptiness toward objectivity" (298): blank, erased, a fall towards total objectification (no wonder that their lost names are compared to household china on the very first page). The encounter with the colonizers, and the glittering promise of their bright, demonic music enacts the sisters' quite futile hope of recovering, or rather, *acquiring* a subjectivity, as if they attempted to recuperate the primordial lack that their very figures embody. Hoping to attain the legitimizing glance of the colonizers, a glance that would endow them with subjectivity, voice, and name, they invite the shining-white master into their silent world.

Instead of acquiring the much desired recognition, the sisters *fall* into shame.¹⁰⁹ They become "fallen women" in many senses, since after the wild night one of them gets pregnant, and this ensures that they will be outcasts in Pakistani society as long as they live. In a futile attempt to counteract the shame that one of them has to bear, the sisters, transformed into "mothers," decide to imprison themselves in their dark and lifeless mansion and never to glimpse the sun in their life. Also, they resolve to act in unison and display the symptoms of pregnancy collectively: no one is allowed to learn which girl is pregnant, not even the narrator; the "mothers" literally enact the vision of a seamlessly collective, magic community:

¹⁰⁹ According to Sartre, "[s]hame is the feeling of an *original fall*, not because of the fact that I may have committed this or that particular fault but simply that I have 'fallen' into the world in the midst of things and that I need the mediation of the Other in order to be what I am" (312). Sartre returns to the issue of shame in the preface that he wrote to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, reading colonization, and the condition of the nation, as the story of falling into shame, quite similarly to Rushdie's novel: "If he [the native] shows fight, the soldiers fire and he's a dead man; if he gives in, he degrades himself and he is no longer a man at all; shame and fear will split up his character and make his inmost self fall into pieces" (13).

In spite of biological improbability, I am prepared to swear that so wholeheartedly did they wish to share the motherhood of their sibling – to transform the public shame of unwedlocked conception into the private triumph of the longed for group baby – that, in short, twin phantom pregnancies accompanied the real one; while the simultaneity of their behaviour suggests the operation of some form of communal mind. (13)

After locking the doors of their mansion and becoming unified (“communal”) through the joint experience of motherhood, the sisters transform the shame of their traumatic experience into collective pride, and the infinite, labyrinth-like mansion also starts to acquire attributes that evoke the nation, such as “mother country” (25), the only “country they possessed” (24), and so on. Renamed as “Nishapur,” their newly discovered “country” refers to that of the Persian poet, Omar Khayyam, who lived in Naishapur, Khorasan, in the eleventh century, and whose name their “collective son” is going to bear. That is, they seem to perform a fall back in time and space as well, as if they wanted to live in the heroic past of Omar Khayyam, and inhabit a place that is completely isolated from the outside world (they lock the doors of their mansion with the largest “padlock to be found in the God-Willing Ironmongery Store” [10], which acts as the “outsize lock of their withdrawal” [11]).

Similarly to the washing chest, then, where Saleem’s national allegory is founded, Nishapur also becomes related to the nation. Both function as hiding spaces, and both are dark and secretive, yet despite the birth of Omar, Nishapur remains a sealed-off, entropical, and lifeless world, where “nothing new seemed capable of growth” (25). Unlike the washing chest in *Midnight’s Children*, which is a very private and intimate space, full of used brassieres and pyjamas evoking the body, subjectivity and sexuality, the hiding space in *Shame* is cold, empty, and it even erases the leftovers of the “mother’s” subjectivity when they become grotesque replicas of each other. Also, whereas the children’s community is related to flying

(first, thought waves fly, then it turns out that one midnight's child is capable of performing this miracle), the mothers' community is defined by gravity and paralysis, which is the antithesis of flight, as the narrator remarks in *Shame*: "The anti-myths of gravity and of belonging bear the same name: flight. [. . .] To fly and to flee: both are ways of seeking freedom..." (90). Thus the mothers' paralysed hiding is a fall in many senses: instead of finding a hiding space that would help them create an alternative allegory, all they achieve is a paralyzed and schizoid isolation.

The darkness that dominates Nishapur is also the result of this paralysis: the blinds remain fastened throughout Omar's childhood, and sunlight is "forbidden" for the "communal" child. The metaphors are reminiscent of *Midnight's Children* (noise, darkness, hidden spaces, etc.), yet they acquire rather different meanings in this novel: instead of giving birth to a pre-symbolic sound, the sisters simply produce an artificial noise, and instead of creating an alternative space, the locked mansion simply becomes the metaphor of a defensive hiding. Even magic is redefined: whereas in *Midnight's Children* Saleem possessed a genuinely magic gift, and his body started falling apart only after he was deprived of it by the Widow, in *Shame* magic is absurd: it is "always already" associated with the fall, to use a Derridean phrase, since the sisters acquire the magic ability of simulating pregnancies when they are already fallen women, locked in Nispahur.

Shame splits the nation, similarly to modernist discourses; it becomes torn between binary oppositions such as inside and outside, darkness and light, and so on. The novel erases exactly those ambiguous spaces where *Midnight's Children* locates the postmodern nation, and this explains why the novel is dark, and why the nations that it imagines are unable to challenge pedagogical discourses. Darkness and light, for instance, one of the most often recurring tropes in this novel, tear the nation apart the moment the Shakil sisters isolate their dark mansion from the outside world. Omar grows up in the dark world of Nispahur where

“despite all the rotting-down of the past, nothing new seemed capable of growth” [. . .] (25), and he becomes sure that he has to escape when he accidentally has a glimpse of the forbidden sunlight. He loses his way in the labyrinth-like mansion, like a time traveller, and comes to a room whose outer wall is demolished by tree-roots; the light streaming through the hole illuminates the world of darkness:

[Omar was] taken unawares by the shocking promise of the dawn light streaming through the hole, he turned tail and fled, his terror leading him blindly back to his own comforting, comfortable room. Afterwards, when he had time to consider things, he tried to retrace his steps, armed with a purloined ball of strings; but try as he might, he never again found his way to that place in the maze of his childhood where the minotaur of forbidden light lived (27).

The “comforting” and “comfortable” darkness of Nispahur is in sharp contrast with the shocking light of the outside world, and, similarly to the opening scene of the novel, it is both dangerous (a “minotaur”) and tempting; it is in the hands of “the Other,” never available for the Self except as an object of desire. Omar “blindly” finds his way back to his room, yet he will never forget the experience, which makes him demand his freedom from his “mothers.”

The sunlight seems to be related to the unattainable “light” of the colonizers, and the civilizing mission, as well as the principles of Western *Enlightenment*, whereas darkness is associated with an isolated, rotting, and blind condition. In another episode, light becomes associated with Zoroastrianism, a term that is also related to the West, or, more precisely, to the encounter of East and West, since Zoroaster is the Westernised version of Zarathustra, the Iranian religious reformer of the 6th century, who also inspired Nietzsche’s famous book. A few years after Omar’s birth, a strange character appears in Q., the town of the three mothers,

whose name is Zoroaster, and who takes up the position of customs officer in a region famous for smuggling and bribery. Both in Nietzsche's texts and in Rushdie's novel, Zoroaster is a devoted servant and follower of the Sun, the central symbol of Zoroastrianism, which acts as a positive element that balances the evil powers of darkness. As Nietzsche writes in the very first paragraph of "Zarathustra's Prologue," the first words of the Prophet after ten years spent in the mountains with contemplation and meditation were addressed to the Sun, which appears to be the principle of life in Nietzsche's text:

When Zarathustra was thirty years old, he left his home and the lake of his home, and went into the mountains. There he enjoyed his spirit and his solitude, and for ten years did not weary of it. But at least his heart changed – and rising one morning with the rosy dawn, he went before the sun, and spoke this to it: 'You great star! What would be your happiness if you had not those for whom you shine!'" (33)

The sun becomes the metaphor of Zarathustra's own self, the token of his role as a prophet, since he decides to follow the course illuminated by the sun and descend from the mountains in order to preach to the people: "Therefore I must descend into the deep: as you do in the evening, when you go behind the sea, and give light also to the underworld, you exuberant star! Like you I must go down, as people say, to whom I shall descend" (33).

In *Shame*, Zoroaster also addresses the sun: standing stark naked on top of concrete bollards (which act as absurd substitutes of Zarathustra's mountain), the customs officer begs the sun to "engulf the planet in its brilliant cleansing fire" (53):

Zoroaster the customs officer had fallen sick under the spell of the bribeless desert and had taken to standing stark naked on top of bollards while mirror-fragments ripped his

feat. Arms outstretched and daughterless, Zoroaster addressed the sun, begging it to come down to earth and engulf the planet in its brilliant cleansing fire” (52-53).

The sun remains invested with magic power in Rushdie’s novel as well, though the context in which it appears makes this role entirely grotesque. The sisters worshipping the “golden dome” of the colonizer’s hotel appear to be no less ridiculous than Zoroaster, the mad version of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, naked, standing at the top of concrete bollards; the sun acts as a distant, unreachable, yet magic entity in both cases.

Whenever there is an encounter between darkness and light, inside and outside, or East and West, the result is either a distorted and artificial noise, as in the case of the sisters’ dance music, or madness and absurdity, as in Zoroaster’s crazy speech. Far from being invested with magic power, then, the space of the postmodern nation is erased by the continuous clash of binary oppositions in this novel. The encounter of these entities does not offer a third option; instead, they produce nothing but *nonsense*, an absurd, meaningless mishmash, which, despite its presymbolic nature, lacks any magic power. There is no androgyny in this novel, no productive merging, and no third space; this explains why the nations imagined remain modern in their structure, unable to challenge the official discourses of colonialism and nationalism.

Splitting Allegories

It is not only binary oppositions that split the nation in this novel; the very national allegories that appear in *Shame* are fragmentary. There are at least four allegorical “impulses” that speak about India and Pakistan in this novel, and they do so in a rather confusing way. As the narrator claims, Pakistan is nothing but a fragmenting palimpsest:

It is well known that the term ‘Pakistan,’ an acronym, was originally thought up in England by a group of Muslim intellectuals. [. . .] So it is a word born in exile which then went East, was born-across or trans-lated, and imposed itself on history; a returning migrant, settling down on partitioned land, forming a palimpsest on the past. A palimpsest obscures what lies beneath. To build Pakistan it was necessary to cover up Indian history, to deny that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani Standard Time. (91)

Just like Pakistan, the very text of this novel is structured like a palimpsest: after the story of the three sisters, the narrative takes a sudden turn and the reader might feel as if s/he started reading a completely new novel:

This is a novel about Sufiya Zinobia, elder daughter of General Raza Hyder and his wife Bilquis, about what happened between her father and Chairman Iskander Harappa, formerly Prime Minister, now defunct, and about her surprising marriage to a certain Omar Khayyam Shakil, physician, fat man, and for a time, the intimate crony of that same Isky Harappa, whose neck had the miraculous power of remaining unbruised, even by a hangman’s rope. Or perhaps it would be more accurate, if also more opaque, to say, that Sufiya Zinobia is about this novel. (59)

We do not know who Sufiya Zinobia is, since she was not mentioned in the first book; the only familiar figure is Omar, the son of the three “mothers,” and even he becomes a “certain Omar Khayyam Shakil,” as if he were introduced here for the first time. Sufiya’s novel is inscribed upon the story of the three sisters: we no longer see events from their perspective,

and just like Omar in this passage, they will later be depicted in a rather cold way as “three crazy vultures” (310) enclosed in their Gothic mansion. The previous story, then, remains repressed under the surface of the new narrative, as if the novel itself became a palimpsest, “increasingly at war with itself” (92), just like Pakistan. These layers inscribed upon each other, similarly to the encounter of light and darkness, or inside and outside, do not produce a miraculous androgyny, but, instead, remain contesting polarities, a “*duel* between two layers of time, the obscured world forcing its way back through what-had-been imposed” (92, emphasis added).¹¹⁰

In “Sufiya’s novel,” we encounter another allegorical image that reminds the reader of the mothers’ community. This second allegory, which evokes and erases the previous one at the same time, acts as another vision of the nation, though it is not quite easy to decide which nations are allegorised by these tropes. Stephanie Moss, for instance, interprets the “mother country” as the vision of India before independence (28), and Sara Suleri also claims that the novel’s first community is imagined to life around the partition of India in 1947: as she argues, Omar Khayyam “was conceived by the three mothers at the moment in time very close to the 1947 partition of India in a town very similar to the border city of Quetta in Pakistan” (180).¹¹¹ These comments suggest that the two communities re-enact the historical

¹¹⁰ The palimpsest metaphor acts as a crucial notion in Freudian psychoanalysis as well as in Derrida’s theories. As Freud writes in one of his short texts, “A Note Upon the ‘Mystic Writing-Pad,’” which Derrida discusses in *Writing and Difference*, the mnemonic function of the mind can be compared to how a palimpsest works, which he calls “mystic writing-pad.” As he argues, the surface of the writing pad, which is a cover-sheet that fastened upon a wax slab, functions as the perceptual consciousness, the layer that receives the stimuli, and the writing on this layer easily becomes erased by simply lifting it. The wax underneath, however, protected by the celluloid, stores the impressions, just like the unconscious. Derrida, true to himself, criticises Freud’s writing pad, inserting it into his general critique of the metaphysical nature of Freud’s writings: “Freud, like Plato, continues to oppose hypomnemonic writing and writing *en tei psychei*, itself woven of traces, empirical memories of present truth outside time, Henceforth, the Mystic Pad, separated from psychical responsibility, a representation abandoned to itself, still participates in Cartesian space and mechanics: *natural* wax, exteriority of the *memory aid*” (*Writing and Difference* 227).

¹¹¹ Several critics refer to the existence of the two „imagined communities,” or, at least, to that of the three mothers, yet none of them, including Suleri and Moss, get beyond simply mentioning their existence. M.D. Fletcher, for instance, calls the mansion of the three sisters „motherland” (98), while Leonard G. Finn argues that the mothers can be read as people who provide Omar with home, which might be interpreted as nation (53). Suresh Chandra also reads the mothers as allegorical figures, standing for India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh

scenario of the partition, the “mother country” acting as the allegory of India, whereas the second image, which intends to “cover up Indian history, to deny that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani Standard Time” (91), stands for Pakistan. In my view, however, these allegories also speak about another issue: the impossibility to allegorize the nation in this novel. Whereas in *Midnight’s Children* there is a central hero, Saleem Sinai, and his magic community is able to challenge the official version of the nation popularised by politicians, here all of these impulses seem to be fragmented: there is no central hero, since neither Omar, nor Sufiya can take up this role (Omar becomes a “peripheral hero” in the second book; Sufiya is called “the wrong miracle”), and the national allegories, instead of challenging the official version, simply destabilize each other. Their meeting, instead of the promise of a momentary androgynous wholeness, results in inversion, just like the inscription on the palimpsest, which, instead of melting, simply highlights the irreconcilable layers of writing.

Let us look more closely at the second imagined community. Sufiya, the novel’s second “heroine,” is born in a family that occupies a mansion quite similar to the mothers’ Nishapur: “I see that I have brought my tale into a second infinite mansion, which the reader will perhaps already be comparing to a faraway house in border town of Q. [. . .]” (76). The parallel between the two mansions is immediately established: both are seen as infinite, labyrinth-like places, and both evoke the nation by the very name they possess: whereas the first is called the “mother country,” the second becomes “Bariamma’s empire,” ruled by and named after the blind and toothless matriarch called Bariamma. Yet this place, as the narrator writes, also functions as the antithesis of the mothers’ entropic world: “but what a complete contrast it affords! For this is no sealed-off redoubt; it bursts, positively bursts with family members and related personnel” (76). Unlike the locked Nishapur, the second mansion is

(Taneja 78). All of these critics seem to detect a certain originary „innocence,” or prelapsarian gesture in the mother’s community, and Suleri’s claim that they allegorise India just before 1947 nicely supports this idea.

bursting with life: when Sufiya's mother, Bilquis, enters this enchanted realm, she finds herself among forty female relatives of her fiancé, stuffed into a "cavernous bedroom" (74), all waiting for their husbands to invade the mansion under the guise of the night. Since old village traditions hold that "the mere fact of being married did not absolve a woman from the shame and dishonour that results from the knowledge that she sleeps regularly with a man" (76), the wise old Bariamma devises this particular sleeping arrangement, which, though established in the name of decency, acts as "an excuse for the biggest orgy on earth" (76). Rani, Bilquis's only friend in her new home, explains what the real function of the mansion is: "'Imagine in the darkness,' Rani giggles while the two of them grind the daily spices, 'who would know if her real husband had come to her? And who would complain? I tell you, Billoo, these married men and ladies are having a pretty good time in this joint family set-up'" (75). Instead of the isolated Nishapur, then, we find a lustful and chaotic mansion that is alive and open, and the only thing that connects the two seems to be the very space that they metaphorise, their blatant and gross inadequacy as national allegories, and their emphatically *feminine* nature: just like the realm of the three mothers, Bariamma's Empire is dominated by a feminine figure, the old, "wise," and toothless matriarch, and appears to be a world in which men can only be midnight visitors and temporary guests, similarly to the shining-white masters invited to the sisters' party at Nishapur.

The "empire's" past is as dark as its present: after encountering her thirty-nine roommates, as well as the invasion of their "husbands" at night, Bilquis has to come to terms with the past of her new family as well. "Lost in the forest of new relatives, wandering in the bloodjungle of the matriarchal home, Bilquis consulted the family Quran in search of these family trees, and found them there, in their traditional place, monkey-puzzled genealogy inscribed in the back of the holy book" (77). Bilquis discovers that her fiancé has eleven legitimate uncles and at least nine illegitimate ones, all listed and named in the holy book,

thirty-two cousins born in wedlock, and innumerable cousins of the bastard uncles, whose names are not mentioned in the Quran (even the most shameless genealogies seem to have their limitations). That is, whereas the sisters' family-tree becomes entirely erased, non-existent, and we do not even get to know who their mother was, Bariamma's empire is obsessed with its uncontrollable and shameful genealogy. Also, while we do not even learn the real names of the sisters, which are lost, just like their household china, in the recesses of the infinite mansion, the names of Bariamma's "clan" are all proudly inscribed in the back of the Koran, in the most sacred and spectacular space that the family possesses.

These measures, of course, also indicate how the two communities cope with shame: the mothers, when they decide to lock Nishapur, also decide to turn their back on shame, and face their "future" with pride. In Bariamma's empire, however, the inscription of the "monkey-puzzled genealogy" (77) suggests an antithetical attitude: the family shamelessly faces its past, and instead of trying to erase it, they take pride in their shameful acts. Pride and shame, however, as several psychologists remark, often function as inverted notions,¹¹² just like the two communities in question. Whereas shamelessness unites the three sisters in their communal motherhood, it is shame that serves as the magic bond in Bariamma's empire, the "glue" that holds "the clan together, binding generations in webs of whispered secrets" (79). The favourite activity of the family is the telling and retelling of the most shameful tales of their past:

These were lurid affairs, featuring divorces, bankruptcies, droughts, cheating friends, child mortality, diseases of the breast, men cut down in their prime, failed hopes, lost beauty, women who grew obscenely fat, smuggling deals, opium-taking poets, pining

¹¹² Donald L. Nathanson argues that "shame is either perceived as a sense of inadequacy relative to the ego ideal, or denied and inverted false pride" (191); Phil Mollon claims that countershame (that is, pride) acts as one of the possible defences against shame: it "is a kind of magic denial of shame in which the person behaves as if they have no experience of shame" (208).

virgins, curses, typhoid, bandits, homosexuality, sterility, frigidity, rape, the high price of food, gamblers, drunks, murderers, suicides and God. (79)

What we encounter here are two opposing attitudes, two antithetical strategies of dealing with shame: whereas the mothers chose silence and pride to cope with the events that they can neither understand, nor acknowledge, to use Cathy Caruth's term, Bariamma's clan chooses never-ending and shameless speech. It is hardly surprising, however, that their speech is far from providing a "faithful" and "accurate" description of their past: when Bilquis tells her story, for instance, we learn that it "altered, first, in the retellings, but finally it settled down, and after that nobody, neither teller, nor listener would tolerate any deviation from the hallowed, sacred text" (79). By sanctifying family tales, Bariamma's empire legitimizes its own past as well as its shame; the stories are established as sacred relics of the community, acting as a "magic glue" that holds "the clan together," fulfilling a function that is quite similar to the function of the voices in Saleem's head, the "magic noise" that also provided a "glue" between the otherwise inconceivably distant members of the community.

Like the palimpsest-metaphor, the act of making stories "hallowed, sacred *text[s]*" revolves around *textuality*, similarly to the family's favourite activity of *inscribing* family genealogies in the Koran. It seems that whereas in *Midnight's Children* the voice/sound is the primary metaphor, in *Shame*, the demonic noise of the sisters' dance music remains a marginal element compared to metaphors associated with textuality, such as palimpsest, storytelling, inscription, and so on. This further difference between the two novels also shows that the miraculous is not textual in Rushdie's fiction; it is related to a pre-symbolic, hidden, androgynous dimension. In *Midnight's Children*, the official national allegory becomes associated with writing: the contest for the title of the midnight's child is announced in the *Times of India*, Nehru congratulates Saleem through a letter published in the same newspaper,

and so on.¹¹³ Saleem becomes concerned with narrating the novel only after the children are castrated by “the Widow” and lose their magic abilities. That is also the moment when Saleem’s body starts to fall apart, so he is hoping that writing would help him acquire some kind of subjectivity. The miraculous community, however, could only exist in the dark, pre-symbolic world dominated by the trope of sound; writing only appears as a desperate attempt to counteract the inevitable fall. It is no wonder, then, that *Shame*, structured around the trope of writing, finds no real hiding space for magic and the postmodern nation.

Besides the three mothers’ community and Bariamma’s Empire, there are two further national allegories in *Shame*. First, the story of the imbecile heroine’s mother, Bilquis, can be read as the allegorical story of Pakistan’s secession. Bilquis is forced to emigrate to Pakistan as a result of an unfortunate event in her family: her father, who is “the chief administrative officer of a glorious Empire” (60), commits one fatal mistake. His “Empire,” contrary to our expectations, turns out to have nothing to do with the British Empire, but only refers to a fifth-rate cinema, the “Empire of Mahmound,” located in the “city of idolaters [. . .] call it Indraprastha, Puranaqila, even Delhi” (60). The father’s mistake is the result of his all too humanitarian thinking: before “the famous moth-eaten partition” (61), when even “going to the pictures had become a political act” (62), and movies had to choose whether to show Muslim or Hindu films, he decides to “rise above all this partition foolishness” (62), and shows movies to both religious groups. The reward of his experiment is first an empty house, then a fatal explosion: since neither Hindu, not Muslim movie-goers could tolerate this all too liberal arrangement, they blow up the cinema, killing Bilquis’s father, and traumatizing the girl for her entire life:

¹¹³ For a different interpretation of writing in the novel (read as poison) see Bényei Tamás, *Apokrif iratok* 288-290.

The walls of her father's Empire puffed outwards like a hot puri while that wind like the cough of a sick giant burned away her eyebrows (which never grew again), and tore the clothes off her body until she stood infant-naked in the street; but she failed to notice her nudity because the universe was ending, and in the echoing alienness of the deadly wind her burning eyes saw everything come flying out, seats, ticket books, fans and then pieces of her father's shattered corpse and the charred shards of the future. (63-64)

The explosion of the Empire evokes images of the “exploding” British Empire, which also marks the birth of the Indian and Pakistani nations. Bilquis is “infant naked,” like a newborn baby, similarly to Saleem in *Midnight's Children*, but her “birth” appears as a rather absurd and traumatic event; she is already a grown up woman, forced to start her life anew. She finds her husband, the Famous Captain Raza Hyder when lying infant-naked and unconscious after the explosion, who takes her to Pakistan, the new “promised land.” Bilquis becomes a “new woman, newly-weed, flying to a bright new world” (68) (similarly to many Muslim families, including Rushdie's, who had to emigrate as a result of the outbreak of religious violence after the partition), like a “new,” rootless, empty “dream of majesty”: “She, whose life had blown up, emptying her of history and leaving in its place only that dark dream of majesty, that illusion so powerful that it demanded to enter the sphere of what-was-real – she, rootless Bilquis, [. . .] now longed for stability, for no-more-explosions [. . .]” (69). Becoming infant-naked, new, “rootless” and pure, flying to “a bright new world,” Bilquis becomes an allegorical figure of Pakistan, which is, just like herself, often called the “land of the pure.”

The event is envisaged as an apocalypse, dominated by fire, which is one of the favourite images used by Rushdie, appearing in all the three novels discussed here. *Midnight's Children*, for instance, ends with a spectacular vision of apocalypse, which perhaps functions

as the last promise of rebirth in the novel, transforming the shreds and patches of the disintegrating allegories into letters of the text, and envisaging their rebirth in the novel itself, in the national narrative which is completed at the very moment of Saleem's final disintegration. *Midnight's Children* ends with the apocalyptic explosion of Saleem's body, which has often been used as a metaphor of the text (and vice versa) in the novel before. When Saleem's mother is pregnant with him, for instance, his body's growth is visualised as that of an expanding text: "What had been (at the beginning) no bigger than a full stop had expanded into a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter; now it was bursting into more complex developments, becoming, one might say, a book – perhaps an encyclopaedia – even a whole language..." (100). Thus when at the very end of the novel we see Saleem's body exploding, ("the cracks are widening, pieces of my body are falling off" [462]), pictured as a "broken creature spilling pieces of itself into the street" (462), the apocalypse of his body can be read as a peculiar transference, the "closure" of his storytelling, the moment when he finally leaks into his very own story, literally, and pieces of his body become transformed into the letters that we read. Though we are not able to retrieve the pre-symbolic, magic sound of the midnight's children, through writing Saleem is able to acquire some kind of subjectivity: he is able to tell his own story.

Unlike in *Midnight's Children*, the Empire's apocalypse does not function as a closure in *Shame*. In this novel, unsurprisingly, there are two apocalypses, and whereas the first marks the foundation of the Pakistani nation, and does contain the promise of rebirth, the second seems to leave no room for such a promise, and simply reiterates the inevitable destruction. That is, the two apocalypses seem to destabilize each other, just like repetitive inversions and national allegories do all through the text:

And then the explosion comes, a shock-wave that demolishes the house, and after it the fireball of her burning, rolling outwards to the horizon like the sea, and last of all the cloud, which rises and spreads and hangs over the nothingness of the scene, until I can no longer see what is no longer there; the silent cloud, in the shape of a giant, grey and headless man, a figure of dreams, a phantom with one arm lifted in a gesture of farewell. (317)

These are the last sentences of *Shame*; similarly to *Midnight's Children*, this novel also ends with an apocalyptic image. Burning and destruction dominate this vision, just like the explosion of Mahmound's Empire, yet instead of the infant-naked and reborn Bilquis, we encounter a vision of destruction. There is neither birth nor novelty involved in this apocalypse; it simply leads to lack and erasure: a "*headless* man" takes farewell from the reader, standing as a "*silent* cloud," as if the image reproduced the exact antithesis of the children's community, located in Saleem's head, bursting with magic noise. Headless and silent, this apocalypse does not promise rebirth, not even in the very narrative that becomes complete with this gesture of farewell.

The instigator of the explosion is Sufiya Zinobia, Bilquis' idiotic daughter, whose birth, similarly to Saleem's, becomes entangled with the birth of the new nation, thus Sufiya becomes the fourth allegorical figure of the nation in *Shame*, after the "mother country," "Bariamma's Empire," and Bilquis. She is born in the chapter entitled "The Wrong Miracle," and her life becomes the reverse image of Saleem's. Right after the moment of her birth, when his father, unable to accept the fact that she is a girl, starts shouting at nurses, doctors, as well as the hospital supervisor, Sufiya reverts to silent blushing, as if she took the shame of the world (and the nation) upon her shoulders:

The walls of the hospital shook and retreated; horses shied, unseating riders, on the nearby polo field. ‘Mistakes are often made!’ Raza shouted. ‘Terrible blunders are not unknown!’ [. . .] ‘There! I ask you, sir, what is that?’ – ‘We see here the expected configuration, also the not uncommon postnatal swelling, of the female...’ – ‘A bump!’ Raza shrieked hopelessly. ‘Is it not, doctor, an absolute and unquestionable *bump*?’ But the brigadier had left the room. ‘And at this point’ – I am quoting from the family legend again – ‘when her parents had to admit the immutability of her gender, to submit, as faith demands, to God; at this very instant the extremely new and soporific being in Raza’s arms began – it’s true! – to blush. (95)

It is this *silent* blushing that marks Sufiya’s allegorical role: she becomes the principle of suffering, and hardly utters a word in the entire novel, as if she became the reverse image of garrulous Saleem, obsessed with his cacophonic *voices*.

Unable to bear the shame and humiliation put upon her shoulders, Sufiya turns into a destructive savage and instigates the apocalyptic explosion that seems to wipe the narrative clean: the “fireball of her burning” hangs over the “*nothingness* of the scene,” until the narrator can see *nothing*, just the gesture of farewell, which leads towards an empty void. Unlike Saleem’s, Sufiya’s body does not “leak into” the text at the moment of the apocalypse, her body parts do not become letters in the narrative, which suggests that no pieces of her subjectivity are preserved in the novel. She remains an empty, stereotypical image, similarly to the three sisters at the beginning of the novel, though while the sisters appeared as dolls, or “sleeping beauties,” she becomes a “vampire.” Even though the novel establishes a strong parallel between her body and the body of the text (the narrator claims, rather enigmatically, that “Sufiya Zinobia is about this novel” (59), as if her body substituted the very narrative), there seems to be nothing that leaks into her narrative after the apocalypse, no pieces of her

subjectivity challenge pedagogical national discourses. The apocalypse simply reinstitutes the all-pervasive lack and silence that haunt this novel.

Sufiya's allegory is dominated by a profound lack, which is manifested both in her silence and in the recurring motif of "headlessness." Apart from the grey headless giant taking farewell from the reader at the end of the novel, this image appears several times during Sufiya's "career" as a vampire. After years of repression, she becomes more and more aggressive, first killing turkeys by wringing their necks, then mortally injuring her sister's fiancé, and finally becoming famous as a mysterious killer, the voracious "White Panther." Since she always attacks the neck of her victims, and finishes her ritualistic act by tearing their heads off, her crimes become known as "headless murders": "Neither the press nor the radio went so far as to link the disappearance of Sufiya Zinobia with the "headless murders," but it was in the wind, and in the bazaars and at the bus depots and over the tables of cheap cafés, the monster began to be given its true name" (288-89). The head, which acts as the very space of the nation in *Midnight's Children*, the space where the voices of the children are summoned, is also missing, or, rather, becomes erased, torn off in this novel. Saleem sees the head as a miraculous place ("nothing but trouble outside my head, nothing but miracles inside it" [207]), so it is no wonder that once heads become cut off, we are literally thrown into nothingness. The account of Sufiya's first four murders, for instance, which take place even before she becomes the mythological "White Panther," already suggests that her primary anger is directed against the head:

The four bodies were all adolescent, male, pungent. The heads had been wrenched off their necks by some colossal force: literally torn from their shoulders. Traces of semen were detected on their tattered pants. They were found in a rubbish dump near a slum.

It seemed that the four of them died more or less simultaneously. The heads were never found. (238)

The heads are wrenched off and never found again, as if Sufiya's primary aim were to cleanse the world of these troublesome body parts. There is no place imagined for the nation in this novel elsewhere than in the nothingness that the final apocalypse brings; it seems to exist in this non-place between binary oppositions and between contesting allegories.

Sufiya herself becomes a hole, a hole in the Pakistani nation's history, the repressed story behind the rivalry of the two presidents, Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa. Perhaps we can read her story as the repressed feminine alternative behind the official story whose actors are exclusively male; she becomes "the collective fantasy of a stifled people, a dream born of their rage" (291), the shameful child of the official President, Raza Hyder (whom critics often identify with Zia ul-Haq¹¹⁴), embodying the repressed stories, lives, and impulses that the official regime attempted to wipe out in the name of religious fundamentalism. However, what Sufiya offers is not really a viable alternative, a productive "return of the repressed," but, rather, the "return of a hole" that reasserts itself at the end of the novel in the image of the final apocalypse. When she escapes from the imprisonment that her family has imposed upon

¹¹⁴ Brennan, for instance, claims that Iskander Harappa is associated with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto: "Iskander Harappa [. . .], whose estate in the Punjab is referred to as 'Mohenjo,' recalls the ancient Indus Valley Civilization ('Harappan'), situated in the area of central Pakistan. Its most important archaeological site at Mohenjo-Daro is thereby a subtle reference to Bhutto's reign of terror, since it recalls Mohenjo-Daro's name – the 'mound of the dead' and the site is located just outside Larkana, the Bhutto family home" (119). As for Raza Hyder, according to Brennan, he acts as "the counterpart of Pakistan's other great postwar ruler, Zia ul-Haq [. . .]. 'Raza,' an alternate form of 'raja', of course suggests the 'Raj' – the British governmental authority that rules India from 1858 to 1947. The quintessential *chamcha*, Raza continues the Empire's practice of evoking the profoundest spiritual principles of religion and tradition to justify a strategy of tyranny and theft. More importantly to the Pakistanis themselves, despite his nationalist declarations, he represents no improvement over his British predecessors. Combining 'anti-imperialist' talk and freebooting ways, he recalls the legendary hero Hyder Ali, the infamous ruler of Mysore, a scoundrel and freebooter from the South" (120). Brennan also analyses the name of Sufiya, which he associates with the Muslim mystics, the 'Sufis,' and reads her figure as the embodiment of love as well as the shame of her father's tyrannical rule: "The name 'Sufiya' Zinobia comes, of course, from the Muslim mystics, the 'Sufis.' It is appropriate for her, not only because the Sufis have usually been forced by persecution to live a semi-clandestine existence, but because their central tenet is that 'love rather than fear [should be] the determinant of man's relationship with God.' As her blushing registers the shamefulness of her father's tyrannical rule, love seems an appropriate emotional label for her, until this too degenerates into the blind savagery of her arbitrary beheadings, and the sect of love becomes just another version of Zia's demagogic order carried out under an Islamic pose" (121).

her, breaking her chains and the windows of the attic, the place of her confinement (which no doubt has become the most “suitable” place for such “madwomen” since *Jane Eyre*), she literally leaves a Sufiya-shaped hole behind: “An empty attic. Broken chains, cracked beams. There was a hole in the bricked-up window. It had a head, arms, legs” (264). That is, Sufiya literally creates a “Sufiya-Zinobia-shaped hole in a brick-up window” (267), which functions as the metonymic trace of her escape, and which is another instance of the lack that continuously reasserts itself in this novel. Furthermore, the final apocalypse is also Sufiya’s doing: we witness the “fireball of her burning” (317) that “rises and spreads and hangs over the nothingness of the scene” (317), and are left with the image of a giant, “grey and headless man” (317), as if the very last sentence of the text reasserted the lack that Sufiya’s allegory is built upon.

The four national allegories, then, instead of illuminating different faces of the Pakistani nation, simply destabilize each other in *Shame*. First, the shameless and isolated “mother country” is inverted by Bariamma’s explosive and shameful Empire, and then Bilquis’ apocalyptic rebirth is erased by Sufiya’s apocalyptic death. The allegories, just like different layers of a palimpsest, are inscribed upon each other, yet instead of leaving room for alternative challenges, they simply become antithetical versions, “increasingly at war” (92) with each other. Furthermore, unlike Saleem’s magic community in *Midnight’s Children*, born in the dark washing chest, the four allegories of *Shame* are unable to find such productive hiding spaces. Neither Nishapur, nor Bariamma’s bedroom, Mahmound’s Empire or Sufiya’s attic can function as an adequate “third space.” These are artificially locked, claustrophobic spaces, which erase even the last remnants of their tenants’ subjectivities, and they tend to explode at the end, as a result of their artificial, entropic nature. Therefore, *Shame* provides no productive space for an alternative nation to emerge: unlike India in *Midnight’s*

Children, Pakistan remains an artificial construction in this novel, lacking any trace of subjective voices.

The Space of the Nation

This negative attitude towards the nation is not simply a theoretical stance stemming from postmodernism; it is also due to the fact that Rushdie was against the idea of Pakistan as a separate nation and advocated a unified India. Pakistan is described in the novel as an artificial, Western construction, quite similarly to the spaces that the four allegories inhabit:

It is well known that the term ‘Pakistan,’ an acronym, was originally thought up in England by a group of Muslim intellectuals. P for the Punjabis, A for Afghans, K for Kashmiris, S for Sind and the ‘tan,’ they say, for Baluchistan. (No mention of the East Wing, you notice; Bangladesh never got its name in the title, and so, eventually, it took the hint and seceded from the secessionists. Imagine what such a double secession does to people!) – So it was a word born in exile which then went East, was borne-across or trans-lated, and imposed itself on history [. . .] (91)

Pakistan was imagined by Muslim intellectuals in the West, and then “imposed itself on history” (91); this explains both the artificial nature of the construction and the absurdity that ensues whenever the East and West encounter each other in the novel. (The sisters’ Western style dance music, for instance, forced out of Eastern instruments, or the appearance of the mad Zoroaster, his name recalling the Westernised version of Zarathustra.)

Also, the nation seems to be constructed on the basis of the modern ideal: the Pakistan imagined in the West aims to provide a space for different ethnic groups, and follow the

principles of Western parliamentary democracy. This is perhaps why *Shame* is obsessed with binary oppositions, the pillars of Western metaphysics, as well as with the very idea of the modern nation. Yet this ideal collapses on many levels. Not only oppositions and allegories disintegrate, but the very political life of Pakistan is described as corrupt and cruel; a world in which bribery rules, and the outcome of parliamentary elections is known before they actually take place. Both the thematic and the rhetorical levels of the novel suggest that the space of the nation becomes a “non-place”; the modern imagined community is turned into a grotesque and absurd replica which is falling to pieces page by page, even though it holds on to its modern structure desperately (or, perhaps, because it holds on to it so desperately).

The main problem is that even the feeble alternatives that this novel imagines turn out to be psychologically sick. For instance, Sufiya’s allegory attempts to question the rhetoric of Pakistani presidents, and she becomes the repressed (feminine) side of the official story, yet because of the binary oppositions that structure this novel, she does not institute a third option, but simply becomes a silenced, subdued, and therefore dangerous and explosive element: a vampire, literally. Similarly, the three mothers’ allegory attempts to create a space that is alternative: Nishapur is cut off from the outside world; it is dark just like Saleem’s washing chest; its inhabitants possess magic power just like the children did. Yet instead of acquiring a voice and some kind of subjectivity, in Nishapur the mothers become faceless, identical, and artificial, just like the very entropic world that they create. And similarly to Sufiya, they also go mad at the end of the novel, wanting to kill their own son for his “betrayal” (for leaving Nishapur and becoming a “crony” of Pakistani politicians): Omar perceives “the garland of their hatred” (309) behind his eyelids, and understands that “[t]he Beast has many faces. It takes any shape it chooses” (309). Both Sufiya and the mothers become “beasts,” as if they were identified as “the repressed” of history, the hidden, explosive, dangerous element that official version attempt to erase.

This does not mean, however, that *Shame* is not aware of the fact that the postmodern nation would need a third space in order to exist. The novel actually identifies such a space, it is just unable to put anything there apart from psychologically sick and destructive allegories. The most obvious example is Omar's position in the mothers' "community." First, he is seen as an alternative, as "something new in that infertile and time-eroded labyrinth" (25), which already suggests that if there is hope for renewal and regeneration in this world, it resides in him. Omar literally functions as a transitory, displaced memory trace of the mothers' traumatic past, since he becomes the living manifestation of their traumatic experience (he is the son of the colonizers). In spite of their attempt to seal off the past as well as the outside world, the mothers will only communicate with this legacy: Omar becomes the only available memory trace of their trauma, locked away in Nishapur. Therefore, their adoration of Omar functions as an address to their unacknowledged past, as if he became a third space between their past and their present, between the repressed outside world and their claustrophobic mansion, as well as between Englishness and the Indian nation that their triumvirate allegorises.

Furthermore, Omar literally becomes a transitory category, an "intermediary object" in the psychoanalytic sense, as it is defined by D. W. Winnicott and Heinz Kohut.¹¹⁵ He is definitely not experienced as a Freudian object, which is external to the self, and which can be cathected with the instinctual investment that Freud calls object-love. Rather, he becomes an intermediary object, experienced as the extension of the self, occupying a peculiar transitory realm between the self and the outside world. This particular object can only be loved with narcissistic love, as Kohut argues, and this is exactly what happens with Omar and his three mothers in *Shame*. After the mothers' resolution to withdraw from the outside world, which literally indicates a withdrawal of instinctual investment from external objects, they develop a

¹¹⁵See Winnicott's *Playing and Reality* and Kohut's *The Analysis of the Self*. Briefly, the intermediary object is experienced as the extension of the self, situated in the transitory realm between self and other, and for that reason, it is both an external and an internal object for the self.

megalomaniac attitude towards their own egos, which become unified, communal, and loved in this process. By virtue of developing the same symptoms of pregnancy, the mothers become almost identical, as if they were transferring the love of the golden hotel to the love of their own narcissistic selves: “Although some five years separated Chhunni from Bunny, it was at this time that the sisters, by virtue of dressing identically and through the incomprehensible effects of their unusual, chosen life, began to resemble each other so closely that even the servants made mistakes” (13). They withdraw their object-libidos from the outside world and seal themselves from the possibility of object love: nothing can more tellingly underline this endeavour than the large padlock that blocks the way to their mansion and functions as “the outsize lock of their withdrawal” (11). Then, after the birth of Omar, their son becomes the sole target of their obsession: as he is turned into an intermediary object between their narcissistic selves and the “legacy” of their previous instinctual investments, acting as the metonymic trace of the past, the trauma, and the outside world.

It is Omar, then, who becomes a third option in the novel, together with Sufiya Zinobia, the retarded child of Captain Raza Hyder. Yet instead of promising a viable, alternative nation, these allegories turn out to be psychologically deformed: Sufiya is an idiot, while Omar, occupying the transitory space between self and other, becomes the primary manifestation of narcissism. The novel seems to be aware of the magic space between binary oppositions, it is just unable to put any entity there that would function the way Saleem’s magic community functioned in *Midnight’s Children*. And this explains why the novel is dark, and why critics such as Brennan call it a bad joke; without the productive use of these hesitant yet magic spaces, the narrative has no chance to offer an alternative, postmodern nation.

The reason for this futility is that there is no productive intermingling, no real androgyny in this text. Or, perhaps, what is missing in this novel is the attempt to counteract

the underlying void that not infrequently pervades Rushdie's novels. There is an originary lack in *Midnight's Children* as well, produced by Aziz's loss of belief and expulsion from "Paradise" (Kashmir) in the very first chapters, yet the children's magic noise counterbalances this void and fills the otherwise fragmenting world with promise and hope. As Saleem remarks, "the hole in the centre of me which was my inheritance from my grandfather Aadam Aziz, was occupied too long by my voices" (192), as if his voices literally filled the empty space that the loss of religious certainties left behind. Perhaps it is this gesture of filling an underlying lack, the heroic attempt of endowing a fragmenting and altogether absurd world with some kind of promise that defines the postmodern nation in Rushdie's fiction.¹¹⁶

Shame deals with this lack in two ways: it either counteracts it with psychologically defective alternatives, or simply leaves it untouched. We have seen what happens in the first case: both Sufiya and Omar fail as viable alternatives. As for the second, the lack remains untouched since the system of binary oppositions that structure this novel makes it impossible for a productive intermingling to emerge. The oppositions, such as two imagined communities, two peripheral heroes, two labyrinth-like mansions, the story of two presidents, and so on, remain sterile all through the text. The productive metamorphosis of these categories simply does not take place in this text; the clearest proof of this is the narrator's own remark concerning masculine and feminine categories; as he claims, "[women] marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me to couch 'male' plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of

¹¹⁶ Even the least hesitant, most self-confident of national narratives, the *Eclipse of the Crescent Moon* (*Egri csillagok*) by Géza Gárdonyi imagines that there is an underlying split, an unavoidable fall from grace, which the heroic nation recuperates: in the first chapter, just like in *Midnight's Children*, we encounter a vision of Paradise, though not that of Aziz and Tai, the boatmen, but of sweet and innocent children, Gergely and Éva, the "original couple," who also fall, inevitably, yet the nation into which they become initiated serves as a spectacular remedy for this (the castle that they heroically defend at the end of the novel reproduces the Paradise that they lost). Instead of the grand vision that Gárdonyi's novel offers, in *Midnight's Children* we see a fall back towards the void, after Saleem's heroic attempt of bringing a performative nation to light, and in *Shame*, the resignation of the very desire to counteract this emptiness: the novel seems to be devoid of the pattern of "national narratives," traces of *bildung*, and promises of redemption, which *Midnight's Children* also reproduces, side by side with the very questioning of these categories.

its *reverse* and ‘female’ side” (189, emphasis added). Afterwards “it turns out that my ‘male’ and ‘female’ plots are the same story, after all” (189), as if these inverted notions always recurred as either the exact opposites of each other, or the very same categories. It is exactly the middle ground, that fertile, androgynous space that Saleem’s India could occupy, which remains intact in this novel.

Attempting Synthesis:

The Satanic Verses

After the plenitude of *Midnight’s Children* and the pervasive lack that we have witnessed in *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses*, first published in 1988, attempts to create a peculiar synthesis of these inverted worlds. Interestingly, both the plenitude of the voice that *Midnight’s Children* promised and the schizoid system of inversions that dominated *Shame* “leak into” this narrative, to use one of Rushdie’s favourite metaphors, as if *The Satanic Verses* aimed at merging the impossible, paradoxical aspects that *Shame* never managed to bring together. The premise of this chapter is that this famous and controversial novel, which has been mostly discussed from the perspective of religion and migration,¹¹⁷ can also be read as the synthesis of the previous two works.

¹¹⁷ As for the criticism dealing with religious questions and sociological issues, the list is endless. See, for instance, Daniel Pipes, *The Rushdie Affair: The Novel, the Ayatollah, and the West*; Malise Ruthven, *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie and the Wrath of Islam*; Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland, *The Rushdie File*; Ziauddin Sardar, *Distorted Imagination: Lessons from the Rushdie Affair*; Sara Suleri, “Contraband Histories: Salman Rushdie and the Embodiment of Blasphemy” in Fletcher (ed.), *Reading Rushdie*; Ali A. Mazrui, “Is *The Satanic Verses* a Satanic Novel? Moral Dilemmas of the Rushdie Affair”; Hani Al-Raheb, “Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*: Fantasy For Religious Satire”; Charles Taylor, “The Rushdie Controversy”; Feroza Jussawalla, “Resurrecting the Prophet: The Case of Salman, the Otherwise”; Peter Jones, “Rushdie, Race and Religion”; Brian Finney, “Demonizing Discourse in Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*”; Sabina Sawhney and Simona Sawhney, “Reading Rushdie after September 11, 2001”; Bridget Fowler, “A Sociological Analysis of the *Satanic Verses* Affair”; and so on. As for the questions of migration and identity, see Peter Jones, “*The*

Few critics notice this peculiar “development”; it is Roger Y. Clark who refers to it when he claims that the three novels constitute a loose trilogy, but he only perceives a development in the figure of the “Beast,” the “dark force,” which is getting stronger and stronger in Rushdie’s novels.¹¹⁸ Clark claims that *The Satanic Verses* is the most “dangerous” novel in this respect; it is the darkest of the three, the most “satanic” text, literally. However, I think that the “Beast” is definitely more dominant in *Shame*, despite the “reception” of *The Satanic Verses*, and its very title. *The Satanic Verses* can rather be regarded as a peculiar synthesis of the earlier novels, a bold mixture of the plenitude of *Midnight’s Children* and the lack of *Shame*. We encounter a splitting, fragmenting, and continuously metamorphosing world in this novel, which makes it extremely difficult for the nations to find their “hiding” space, yet this world is not devoid of magic, which assures the return of magic unisonance as well as androgyny. I argue that, as a result of this peculiar synthesis, *The Satanic Verses* finds a new way to imagine the nation, which retains the magic that we have seen in *Midnight’s Children*, yet, taking the lesson of *Shame* into account, it also reduces the metaphysical dimension that haunted Saleem’s nation to an almost imperceptible degree. The result of this endeavour proves to be successful: after the promising yet inevitably disintegrating allegory of Saleem Sinai and the unrelieved nothingness of *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses* finds a space for performative nations which does not simply act as a temporary hiding place, but also guarantees their permanent *survival*. *The Satanic Verses* is, then, the novel of survival, the only one of the trilogy that ends with the promise of rebirth and renewal.

Satanic Verses and the Politics of Identity” in Fletcher (ed.), *Reading Rushdie*; Gillian Gane, “Migrancy, the Cosmopolitan Intellectual, and the Global City in *The Satanic Verses*”; Vijay Mishra, “Postcolonial Differend: Diasporic Narratives of Salman Rushdie”; Peter Kalliney, “Globalization, Postcoloniality, and the Problem of Literary Studies in *The Satanic Verses*”; Frederick M. Holmes, “The Postcolonial Subject Divided between East and West: Kureishi’s *The Black Album* as an Intertext of Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*”; Rudolf Bader, “*The Satanic Verses*: An Intercultural Experiment by Salman Rushdie.”

¹¹⁸ See chapter one in *Stranger Gods*. The thesis of Clark’s book, however, supports my argument concerning the presence of postmodern nations in Rushdie’s narratives: as he claims, Rushdie posits a fragmented self in a chaotic universe, while also hinting at a mystical ideal of unity. Clark’s “mystical ideal of unity” is akin to what I regard as the metaphysical and magic hiding space of postmodern nations.

The very first sentence of the novel already suggests that a peculiar synthesis is taking place in this text: “To be born again [. . .], first you have to die” (*The Satanic Verses* 3).¹¹⁹ In *Midnight’s Children*, the story begins with the incident of Saleem’s *birth*, whereas in *Shame*, the Shakil sisters’ father *dies* on the very first page; in this novel, however, the very first image that we encounter involves *both*. This motif returns many times in the novel, repeated, for instance, in Gibreel Farishta’s song: “To be born again’, sang Gibreel Farishta tumbling down from the heavens, ‘first you have to die. Ho ji! Ho ji! To land upon the bosomy earth, first one needs to fly. Tat-taa! Taka-thun! How to ever smile again, if first you won’t cry? How to win the darling’s love, mister, without a sigh? Baba, if you want to get born again...”

(3). It is not just the image of birth that returns in this novel, but the magic voices as well: Gibreel is singing while he and Saladin Chamcha, the other main character of the novel, are falling from the sky, after the explosion of the airplane that was taking them from India to England. As it later turns out, it is his singing that saves them from death, which would be the inevitable result of the fall (similarly to the paralysis caused by *falling* into shame in the previous novel). Death, paralysis, falling, and lack are opposed to the plenitude of voice and the magic flight, and, in this novel, flying conquers gravity, recalling the episode when Saleem discovered the children’s voices in *Midnight’s Children*: “Pajama-cord rises painfully half an inch further up the nostril. But other things are rising, too; hauled by that feverish inhalation, nasal liquids are being sucked relentlessly *up up up*, nose-goo flowing *upwards, against gravity, against nature*” (162, emphases added). It is an anonymous, divine power that commands Gibreel to sing:

‘Fly,’ it commanded Gibreel. ‘Sing.’

¹¹⁹ In the subsequent references to *The Satanic Verses* in this chapter I am only going to indicate the page numbers of the novel.

Chamcha held on to Gibreel while the other began, slowly at first and then with increasing rapidity and force, to flap his arms. Harder and harder he flapped, and as he flapped a song burst out of him, and like the song of the spectre of Rekha Merchant it was sung in a language he did not know to a tune he never heard. Gibreel never repudiated the miracle; unlike Chamcha, who tried to reason it out of existence, he never stopped saying that the gazal had been celestial, that without the song the flapping would have been for nothing, and without the flapping it was a sure thing that they would have hit the waves like rocks [. . .]. Whereas instead they began to slow down. The more emphatically Gibreel flapped and sang, sang and flapped, the more pronounced the declaration, until finally the two of them were floating down to the Channel like scraps of paper in a breeze. (9)

It is, then, Gibreel's *voice* that saves the two "heroes," enabling them to fly to England and literally be *reborn* there. The voice is the source of magic and flight, and it becomes associated with divine power, which already evokes the miraculous world of *Midnight's Children*. Yet the nature of this miracle remains profoundly ambiguous: the reader can never be sure whether it is the voice of God or Satan that inspires Gibreel, and this suggests a profound shift from the innocent and emphatically secular magic that Saleem possesses towards more diabolical (yet also more viable) alternatives. Also, whereas Saleem believes in the angelic origin of his voices only for a short period of time, and becomes utterly disappointed in the end, this ambiguous, angelical-diabolical option is constantly there in *The Satanic Verses*. Quite ironically, it is the only thing in this relentlessly metamorphosing and daringly questioning text that remains constant.

Death and schizophrenia, the weighty legacy of *Shame*, also appear in *The Satanic Verses*: the very structure of the novel suggests that we are dealing with a profoundly

schizophrenic world. The novel is literally split, since the even chapters take place in London, the metropolitan capital of the West, where the two migrants try to find their place and establish a new life, whereas the odd chapters take the reader to the East, and we encounter a number of stories set either in the 7th century, the time of Muhammad, or the eighties, the time of Ayatollah Khomeini. Furthermore, just like in *Shame*, we have two main characters: Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha. It seems that this text can no longer be structured around such a central allegorical figure as Saleem Sinai, yet the main characters of the novel are not mentally retarded, like Sufiya Zinobia, or “peripheral,” like the fat and shameless Omar Khayyam Shakil in *Shame*. *The Satanic Verses* seems to synthesise the two earlier novels on the level of its main characters as well; whereas the schizoid doubling of *Shame* leaks into the novel, Saleem’s central position also returns, since Gibreel and Saladin are by no means peripheral characters. Perhaps the entire novel can be read as the struggle of their stories as well as perspectives, whereas in *Shame*, instead of such a struggle, Omar and Sufiya simply drift into the plot, become inscribed upon each other, and finally explode in the apocalypse that wipes their stories off the face of the world. Gibreel and Saladin, though they indeed split the narrative, also structure it, and it is their very antagonism that moves it forward. Their stories, just like that of Saleem, Sufiya, and Omar, lead towards an apocalypse (unsurprisingly, there are two apocalypses in this novel, just like in *Shame*), yet the fact that Saladin manages to stay alive suggests that we encounter a new strategy in this novel, which offers an alternative both for Saladin and for the performative nation to survive in this antagonistic world.

The Sounds of Englishness

The Satanic Verses is not a novel about a particular nation, yet it abounds in national allegories. The plot begins with the migration of the main characters from India to England, putting England into the main focus of the narrative, yet the second chapter immediately takes the reader back to Mecca, and India also returns at the end of the novel. It seems that *The Satanic Verses* gives up the desire to function as a narrative of a single nation, and drifts towards the options offered by transnationalism,¹²⁰ since it envisages a hybrid, continuously metamorphosing interaction between various nations as a model for any nation's existence. This interaction is visualised in the trope of the ghost: at one point, Gibreel defines London as a "Crusoe-city, marooned on the island of its past, and trying, with the help of a Man-Friday underclass, to keep up appearances" (439). Migrants appear as ghosts "haunting" England, reminding the English of their colonial past, on which their present is "marooned" (i.e., imprisoned, like Robinson in Defoe's novel). These haunting ghosts become internal to any national allegory that appears in this novel, erasing the promise of "wholeness" that we have seen in *Midnight's Children*.

There are other ghosts that haunt in this novel as well. After the explosion of their plane, the two heroes find themselves in the garden of an ancient English lady called Rosa Diamond. She immediately becomes associated with ghosts as well as the English nation:

I know what a ghost is, the old woman affirmed silently. Her name was Rosa Diamond; she was eighty-eight years old; and she was squinting beakily through her salt-caked bedroom windows, watching the full moon's sea. And I know what it isn't, too, she nodded further, it isn't a scarification or a flapping sheet, so pooh and pish to all *that* bunkum. What's a ghost? Unfinished business, is what. (129)

¹²⁰ For transnationalism, see Chapter 1, "Theorising the Nation," page 8-9.

As it soon turns out, the ghost she is referring to is the ghost of William the Conqueror, whose vision she encounters every night whenever the moon is full. It seems that she has the magic ability to go back in time, and through her figure, the conquest becomes a continuously recurring event that never really ceased in the past centuries: “Nine hundred years! Nine centuries past, the Norman fleet had sailed right through this Englishwoman’s home. On clear nights when the moon was full, she waited for its shining, revenant ghost” (129). It is the compulsive return of this vision that acts as a magic spectacle that produces a “solid and unchanging” notion of Englishness in the novel, momentarily restoring the otherwise fragmenting national allegories: “Repetition had become a comfort in her antiquity; the well-worn phrases, *unfinished business*, *grandstand view*, made her feel solid, unchanging, sempiternal, instead of the creature of cracks and absences she knew herself to be” (130).

Homi Bhabha comments on this episode in “DissemiNation,”¹²¹ the very essay that introduces his theory concerning the pedagogical and performative aspects of the nation. He reads Rosa as the allegorical figure of the English nation, or more precisely, of pedagogical Englishness:

Gifted with phantom sight, Rosa Diamond, for whom repetition had become a comfort in her antiquity, represents the English *Heim* or homeland. [. . .] Constructed from the well-worn pedagogies and pedigrees of national unity – her vision of the Battle of Hastings is the anchor of her being – and, at the same time, patched and fractured in the incommensurable perplexity of the nation’s living, Rosa Diamond’s green and pleasant garden is the spot where Gibreel Farishta lands when he falls out from the belly of the Boeing over sodden, southern England. (167)

¹²¹ Published both in his collection of essays titled *The Location of Culture* and the influential volume that he edited, *Nation and Narration*.

Predictably, Bhabha reads Gibreel's figure as the living performative principle that disturbs the national pedagogy of Rosa, whose "returning gaze crosses out the synchronous history of England, the essential memories of William the Conqueror [. . .]" (168), as if he indeed became the "performative agent" set on the mission to subvert the English nation. According to Bhabha, it is this tension between Rosa's national pedagogy and the gesture of the migrant who proudly wears the clothes of Rosa's deceased husband, Sir Henry Diamond (thus tricking the police searching for illegal migrants, who regard him as a respectable, old friend of Rosa) that writes the English nation in this novel. As he claims, Gibreel "mimics the collaborative colonial ideologies of patriotism and patriarchy, depriving those narratives of their imperial authority (167-68), and he becomes an "avenging migrant" (169) whose gesture shows that "the national memory is always the site of hybridity of histories and the displacement of narratives" (169).

This argument supports Bhabha's thesis very well: he reads both Rosa's and Gibreel's figure in the light of his theory, and, somewhat automatically, endows them with the role of embodying the pedagogical and the performative aspects of nationhood. In my view, however, neither of these characters can be said to perform these impulses exclusively. Bhabha attributes too much power to Gibreel, who is far from being an "avenging migrant," but rather becomes a helpless and paralysed medium through which different forces and impulses are enacted. On the other hand, Rosa's figure is also more complex and more dubious than Bhabha supposes; though she indeed acts as the allegorical figure of the English nation, providing a momentary vision of national unity, her allegory does not entirely function as a pedagogical construction, and, in this respect, she resembles Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*. I argue that it is not Rosa's fragmenting allegorical figure that produces a "national unity" in this novel, and not even the *vision* of the Battle of Hastings, but there are certain

voices and sound effects involved in the recurring image of ghosts which are responsible for creating a momentary national unisonance.

But let us look at Gibreel's figure first. According to Bhabha, he becomes "the mote in the eye of history, its blind spot that will not let the nationalist gaze settle centrally" (168). Perhaps Gibreel does disturb the "nationalist gaze" through his gesture of mimicking Sir Henry Diamond, but Bhabha never really takes into consideration the fact that he actually becomes imprisoned by Rosa Diamond, and performs various roles for her in this episode simply because of *her* will. Besides impersonating Henry Diamond, Rosa endows the migrant with several other roles. Gibreel "lands" in England exactly at the time when she is having a vision of the Battle of Hastings, and this makes her identify Gibreel with William the Conqueror at a glance, finally fulfilling her obsessive desire: "She closed, once more, her reminiscent eyes. When she opened them, she saw. Down by the water's edge, no denying it, something beginning to move. What she said aloud in her excitement: 'I don't believe it!' – 'It isn't true!' – 'He's never *here*!'" (130). It is only after impersonating the "essentialist memories" of William the Conqueror, to use Bhabha's phrase, that Gibreel becomes Sir Henry Diamond, and after the short episode of tricking the police, Rosa soon finds another role for him: he becomes her Argentine lover, Martín de la Cruz. Rosa keeps Gibreel imprisoned by her tremendous will; her "stories [are] winding round him like a web [. . .]" (146), and he constantly feels a pain in his navel, as if he was indeed trying to be reborn, or, more precisely, recreated by Rosa Diamond. Even though Gibreel attempts to conquer the city, setting out on his mission with a map, "London from A to Z," which already signals his desire of total conquest, his mission fails; he loses his lover as well as his sense of himself, and returns to India as a raging schizophrenic, only to commit suicide. In other words, both the roles he plays for Rosa and his unfulfilled mission suggest that he is anything but an

“avenging migrant”; even if he disturbs the “nationalist gaze” in the novel, this gesture is far from what I would call performative.

As for Rosa’s vision of Englishness, it is also more complex than Bhabha assumes. First, the fact that she experiences the vision of the Conqueror as the return of a ghost, an “unfinished business,” suggests that the kind of nation (and history) she allegorizes is far from being a sacred, finished, linear, and pedagogical entity. Englishness for her appears to be a repetitive, ambiguous process, a vision that keeps her otherwise fragmenting self together, making her feel “solid, unchanging, sempiternal, instead of the creature of cracks and absences she knew herself to be” (130). Furthermore, the very fact that the allegory is founded upon the moment of conquest, the intrusion of the alien, makes this a strange emblematic moment of nationhood. Therefore, Englishness is not constituted through a didactic national pedagogy, but rather, it appears as a constantly returning traumatic experience.

The Conqueror’s ghost seems to produce its own sound effects:

When the full moon sets, the dark before the dawn, that’s their moment. Billow of sail, flash of oars, and the Conqueror himself at the flagship’s prow, sailing up the beach between the barnacled wooden breakwaters and a few inverted skulls. – O, I’ve seen things in my time, always had the gift, the phantom sight. – The Conqueror in his pointy metal-nosed hat, passing through her front door, gliding betwixt the cakestands and antimacassared sofas, like an echo resounding faintly through that house of remembrances and yearnings; then falling silent; *as the grave*. (130, emphasis in the original)

William the Conqueror appears as a “resounding echo” that disturbs Rosa’s otherwise silent world, and enters her realm just as the colonizers invaded the Shakil sisters’ silent and

enclosed mansion, as a “conqueror,” invited and desired. (“I long for them sometimes” [130], says Rosa, when she contemplates upon her visions). What we are witnessing in this episode is the return of the moment when the English nation was “founded” nine hundred years ago, and also, the very origin of the national allegory in the novel, and both of these seem to be entangled with the sound, the echo. Ironically, it is the echo that provides magic unisonance, keeping the otherwise fragmenting self (and nation) together, despite the fact that the very nature of this trope questions unisonance. The text seems to be aware of the fact that the transcendental is based on some kind of erasure, yet it does not seem to mind; the original “utterance” is secondary in this scenario, just like the fact that the myth of Englishness is based on the *Norman* conquest.

The sound appears as an entity locked away, buried in a “treasure chest” which opens only for the moment of the Conqueror’s return:

Nine hundred years ago all this was under water, this portioned shore, this private beach, its shingle rising steeply towards the little row of flaky-paint villas with their peeling boathouses crammed full of deckchairs, empty picture frames, ancient tuckboxes stuffed with bundles of letters tied up in ribbons, mothballed silk-and-lace lingerie, the tearstained reading matter of once-young girls, lacrosse sticks, stamp albums, and all the buried treasure-chest of memories and lost time. (129)

The mansion containing the buried chests, which seems to be waiting for the Conqueror to “glide betwixt” “empty picture frames,” acts as the storehouse of memory: when the Norman heroes return, the whole house becomes alive, as if these ghosts were released from ancient “tuckboxes.” Rosa’s vision appears as a momentary revelation, as if we got a glimpse of what

is hidden in the buried treasure-chests, quite similarly to Saleem's discovery of the children's voices in *Midnight's Children* while hiding in the washing chest.

Furthermore, the list of the memories hidden in the mansion reminds the reader of several other similar lists in Rushdie's novels. Bariamma's tales in *Shame*, for instance, the tales which serve as a glue that keeps the family together, are recounted in a way that also constitute an enumeration:

These were lurid affairs, featuring divorces, droughts, cheating friends, child mortality, diseases of the breast, men cut down in their prime, failed hopes, lost beauty, women who grew obscenely fat, smuggling deals, opium-taking poets, pining virgins, curses, typhoid, bandits, homosexuality, sterility, frigidity, rape, the high price of food, gamblers, drunks, murderers, suicides, and God. (79)

Bariamma's list leads towards a spectacular (anti)climax, God acting as the final image that terminates her obscene tales, which are the very stories that create her Empire. Similarly, the final image in Rosa's list, the buried treasures of memory and lost time, also functions as a climactic image, since it summarizes everything that the list has enumerated before. It seems that in both cases the nation is constituted through a vertigo that apparently leads towards a climactic metaphor, as if it mocked and mimicked teleology; the list evokes the illusion of reaching its final point, and being complete, yet, ironically, the very nation becomes defined as an element that is missing from both: the Conqueror arrives as the *unfinished* business that supplements empty picture frames, and Sufyia Zinobia, "the juiciest and goriest of all the juicygory sagas" (79) of Bariamma's Empire, is the only story that cannot be contained and tamed by Bariamma's recital.

Furthermore, at the very beginning of *The Satanic Verses*, we also find a similar list: when Gibreel and Saladin's airplane explodes, signifying the explosion of their past lives, identities, and homelands, the narrator also enumerates the things that they lose in that moment:

Above, behind, below them in the void there hung reclining seats, stereophonic headsets, drink trolleys, motion discomfort receptacles, disembarkation cards, duty-free video games, braided cups, blankets, oxygen masks. Also [. . .] mingling with the remnants of the plane, equally fragmented, equally absurd, there floated the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mothertongues, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes, extinguished futures, lost loves, the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, *land, belonging, home*. (4)

Just like in the previous instances, we find the most significant metaphors at the end of this list: after the vertigo of video games and stereophonic headsets, the words in italics, *land, belonging, home*, signify that this enumeration is also concerned with the very same issues that the previous two addressed: nation(s). *Land, belonging, home* are *booming* words, related to sound effects, just like the "resounding" echo of William the Conqueror in the previous episode, associating nations with unisonance and transcendence again. Yet the special position of these images at the end of lists makes this transcendence dubious; the nation acts as a final transcendental signified, yet the fact that these lists mock teleology puts it into a self-reflexive, ironical context.

But let us return to Rosa Diamond's sounds. When she recounts the memories of the battle of Hastings, the third person narrative switches to the first person, as if it allowed the reader to get closer to Rosa's own voice:

– Once as a girl on Battle Hill, *she* was fond of recounting, always in the same time-polished words, – once as a solitary child, *I* found myself, quite suddenly and with no sense of strangeness, in the middle of a war. Longbows, maces, pikes. The flaxen-Saxon boys, cut down in their sweet youth. Harold Arroweye and William with his mouth full of sand. Yes, always the gift, the phantom-sight. – The story of the day on which the child Rosa had seen a vision of the battle of Hastings had become, for the old woman, one of the landmarks of her being [. . .]. (130, emphases added)

First the third person narrator addresses Rosa as a “she,” but before he manages to finish the sentence, Rosa interrupts and speaks as an “I,” reminiscing about her first vision of William the Conqueror. The narrative seems to reproduce the very process she goes through, letting us closer and closer to the secret of the nation she is in search of.¹²² A first person voice intrudes into the text, which seems to let the reader closer to the very subjective vision Rosa has, but this interruption is soon terminated by a dry, third person account of what happened. This, again, suggests that the moment of national unisonance is beyond what Bhabha regards as the pedagogy of nationhood; it is a temporary, hesitant moment in the novel.

Rosa’s intervention into the third person narrative is not the only instance of such intrusions. In the very first chapter, just after we witness the miracle of Saladin and Gibreel’s flight, when the narrator is contemplating about the nature of the miraculous event, unable to believe that “men can fly,” another first person voice intervenes into the narrative and attempts to “explain” what happened:

¹²² This, again, reminds one of the memorable episode in *Midnight’s Children*, when Saleem Sinai discovered the children’s voices inside his head, since in that crucial moment there was a switch in the narrative voice as well, though not from the third person to the first, but vice versa: “And then noise deafening, manytongued terrifying, *inside his head!*... Inside a white wooden washing-chest, within the darkened auditorium of my skull, my nose began to sing” (162). The switch suggests that the narrative has lost control: Saleem is unable to cope with the discovery of the children’s voices, that is why an ambiguous third person voice registers the events in this moment of paralysis, and he is able to recount what happened only after three meaningful dots.

I know the truth, obviously. I watched the whole thing. As to omnipresence and –
potence, I’m making no claims at present, but I can manage this much, I hope.

Chamcha willed it and Farishta did what was willed.

Which was the miracle worker?

Of what type – angelic, satanic – was Farishta’s song?

Who am I?

Let’s put it this way: who has the best tunes? (10)

A number of critics identified this voice as the voice of omnipotent power, most likely, that of Satan¹²³. The voice claims that he (?) is omniscient (“I know the truth, obviously”), yet it is also obvious that he is quite unwilling to share his knowledge with us, and his intervention is rather dubious. The final question in this passage (“who has the best *tunes*?”) associates his knowledge with music, locating “the truth” in the realm of sounds again. Perhaps he is unwilling, whereas Rosa is unable to share what they know; the secret of magic flight as well as the nation remain shrouded in mystery. But one thing is for sure: the secret, the “truth” is associated with the trope of sound in this novel, just like in the previous two, and this secret remains inaccessible for the reader. Since the English nation that Rosa allegorizes also becomes associated with this trope, Bhabha’s claim that she represents the pedagogy of national rhetoric simply does not hold.

It seems, then, that *The Satanic Verses* deconstructs even Bhabha’s theory concerning the pedagogical and performative aspects of nationhood: whereas he sets up an opposition

¹²³ Alex Knönagel, for instance, identifies several instances when this voice intervenes in the narrative (though, curiously, he does not mention the episode in question), arguing that “[i]n the novel as well as in the Qur’an, the narrator is omniscient, and occasionally makes direct statements in the text” (70) Paul Brians, whose annotations have become indispensable for interpreting the novel, claims that the last question literally refers to the Devil, since “who has the best tunes?” is an “allusion to a reply of John Wesley when he was reproached for setting his hymns to popular tunes to the effect that the Devil shouldn’t have all the best tunes.” (http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/anglophone/satanic_verses/1.html)

between Rosa's pedagogical Englishness and the performative intervention of the Indian migrant, in my view, the novel does not conform to this neat theory. Ironically, Bhabha seems to be somewhat "pedagogical" in imagining that Englishness is all about pedagogy, whereas the migrant acts as the performative principle pure and simple. The opposition of the pedagogical and the performative is there in the novel, but not in the antagonism of India and England; rather, it should be sought around the thin dividing line that differentiates the trope of sound from that of voice.

Satanic Voices, Ghostly Sounds

Though Rosa Diamond experiences the return of the Conqueror as a "*resounding* echo," she keeps Gibreel imprisoned by singing siren songs to him in her crystal clear *voice*. Gibreel fails to understand a word of her songs; the only thing that he knows is that they make him unable to leave her enchanting realm:

'Blasted English mame,' he told himself. 'Some type of extinct species. What the hell am I doing here?' But stayed, held by unseen chains. While she, at every opportunity, sang an old song, in Spanish, he couldn't understand a word. Some sorcery there? Some ancient Morgan Le Fay singing a young Merlin into her crystal cave? Gibreel headed for the door; Rosa piped up; he stopped in his tracks. (144)

Whereas the sound effects of the Norman Conquest return as hesitant signs of a national unisonance, Rosa's voice acts as a tempting, irresistible, didactic principle that literally

imprisons Gibreel. I think it is not the returning ghost of the Norman Conquest that makes her the pedagogical figure of English nationhood, but the apparently unlimited power of her voice. Her allegorical role inspires the stories she tells to Gibreel, and leaves no room at all for his intervention, which he attempts only once: when a “pair of fine new horns” appear on Saladin’s head, Gibreel tries to call the ancient lady’s attention to this extraordinary incident, yet Rosa only tells him that “there was nothing new under the sun, she had seen things, the apparitions of men with horned helmets, in an ancient land like England there was no room for new stories, every blade of turf had already been walked over a hundred thousand times” (144). Rosa literally silences Gibreel, leaving no room for his stories and his voice; it is her *voice* that becomes the pedagogical principle of Englishness, which remains powerful despite the fact that her body is fragmenting, and she dies on her 89th birthday. However, Rosa’s voice haunts Gibreel even after her death: when he is finally able to leave her “cave,” a tempting singing enchants him to a boathouse. He “[w]ent towards the song” (156) without hesitation, and found (the ghost of) Rosa there: “She lay down amid the random clutter of an English life, cricket stumps, a yellowed lampshade, chipped vases, a folding table, trunks; and extended an arm towards him. He lay down by her side” (167). Still associated with the rags and patches of national life, to quote Gellner, Rosa’s ghost¹²⁴ tempts Gibreel, literally singing him into her cave. Her voice acts as the self-confident, seductive, pedagogical voice of Englishness, which has nothing to do with the hesitant sound that marked the visions of William the Conqueror.

¹²⁴ As it later turns out, it was the ghost of Gibreel’s dead lover, Rekha Merchant, who played a trick on him and appeared in the form of Rosa just to make love to him once more. She is aware of Gibreel’s experiences, since she watches and follows him everywhere, thus she can perfectly imitate Rosa, even playing with the icons of Englishness, when she identifies with her role: she chooses a perfect place to lay down amidst “the random clutter of an English life” (167). The episode illuminates the fact that Rosa’s pedagogy rests on the “rags and patches” of nationalism, which is nothing but a superficial set of elements available for imitation. Furthermore, Rekha ridicules the desire of both male characters, Gibreel and Saladin, to “conquer” England, which appears as a woman to be seduced (Saladin also finds himself “dreaming of the Queen, of making tender love to the Monarch. She was the body of Britain, the avatar of State, and he had chosen her, joined with her; she was his Beloved, and he had chosen her” [169]): it is not Gibreel who seduces and conquers England, but vice versa, he becomes a tool in Rosa’s (i.e., England’s) hands.

The way Rosa imprisons Gibreel echoes the episode of Mahound's encounter with the Archangel Gabriel, the famous scene when the prophet is tempted by the satanic verses. Both Mahound and Gibreel are seduced by the Voice, the Voice of Rosa, and the Voice of Satan, respectively, and they become linked to this Voice through their navel, a symbolic cord, which appears in the Koran as well¹²⁵. In the Koran, just like in Rushdie's novel, Muhammad is connected to the divine power through a magic cord: "Muhammad approached closer to Allah, and Allah leaned down towards him, so that it became as it were a case of *one chord* serving two bows or closer still. Then He revealed to His servant that which He had to reveal" (Sura 53, 530, emphasis added). This cord, which serves as a secret and magical means of connection, becomes the focus of attention in both episodes; in *The Satanic Verses*, Mahound¹²⁶ is bound to the Archangel through an umbilical cord: "Mahound, lies *listening*, entranced, I [Gibreel] am bound to him, navel to navel, by a shining cord of light, not possible to say which of us is dreaming the other. We flow in both directions along the umbilical cord" (110, emphasis in the original). It is this very metaphor that describes the relationship of Rosa and Gibreel as well: "As with the businessman of his dreams [i.e., Mahound], he felt helpless, ignorant... she seemed to know, however, how to draw images from him. Linking the two of them, navel to navel, he saw a shining cord" (154). In both episodes, the magic "chord serving two bows" that we encountered in the Koran recurs as a "shining cord" that connects an

¹²⁵ This episode heavily relies on the Koran in its rhetoric, quoting the sura from which the satanic verses were erased. (As it is well known, several orthodox Muslim scholars still doubt the existence of the satanic verses, and do not accept that these were ever recorded in the Koran. For a historical account of the "verses," see *History of Al-Tabari*, vol. 6.)

¹²⁶ Muhammad is consistently called Mahound in the novel, which was also one of the causes of the attacks, since Mahound, as well as Mahomet, are distorted European versions of the prophet's name. Rushdie explains his choice both in the novel and in one of his essays titled "In Good Faith." In the novel he writes that Mahound's name functions in a very subversive way, as it turns the insults (of Europe) into "strength," and it seems to be part of the project of "writing back" to the Empire (the metaphor, which is now well-known in postcolonial studies, also comes from Rushdie): "Here he is neither Mahomet nor MocHammered; has adopted, instead, the demon-tag the farangis hung around his neck. To turn insults into strength, whigs, Tories, Blacks all chose to wear with pride the names they were given in scorn; likewise, our mountain-climbing, prophet-motivated solitary is to be the medieval baby-fightener, the Devil's synonym: Mahound" (93). In his essay, he basically repeats the same argument: "Central to the purpose of *The Satanic Verses* is the process of reclaiming language from one's opponents. [...] 'Trotsky' was Trotsky's jailer's name. By taking it for his own, he symbolically conquered his captor and set himself free. Something of the same spirit lay behind my use of the name 'Mahound'" (*Imaginary Homelands* 402).

earthly and a divine being, though this connection is painful in the novel, driving Gibreel mad. Even though he is supposed to be the “divine being,” Gibreel remains a passive medium through which the Voice speaks; the navel-metaphor does not only evoke the miraculous union in the Koran, but it also reveals his lack of power, casting him as a helpless child, depending on another being for sustenance, a child unable to cut the umbilical cord and face the world on his own.¹²⁷

It is this Voice that becomes the only omnipotent power in *The Satanic Verses*. When Gibreel finally utters the revelation to Mahound, not having a clue where the Voice comes from, he describes it as a “force,” an ambiguous “power” that he is neither able to understand, nor to control:

The dragging again the dragging and now the miracle starts in his my our guts, he is straining with all his might at something, forcing something, and Gibreel begins to feel that strength that force, here it is *at my own jaw* working it, opening shutting; and the power, starting within Mahound, reaching to *my vocal cords* and the voice comes.

¹²⁷ The navel is an often recurring metaphor in Rushdie’s fiction. In *Midnight’s Children*, for instance, Saleem’s umbilical cord is preserved in a pickle-jar as a memento of his magic birth, always reminding him of his origins as well as of his allegorical role. His family even takes it to Pakistan, when they are forced to emigrate, and Saleem’s father buries it in the garden of their new home, indicating his desire to put down new roots: “What, pickled in brine, sat for sixteen years in my father’s almirah, awaiting just such a day? What, floating like a water-snake in an old pickle-jar, accompanied us on our sea-journey and ended up buried in hard, barren Karachi-earth? [. . .] ‘A new beginning,’ Amina said, ‘Inshallah, we shall all be new people now.’ Spurred on by her noble and unattainable desire, a workman rapidly enlarged my hole; and how a pickle-jar was produced. Brine discarded on the thirsty ground; and what-was-left-inside received the mullah’s blessings. After which, an umbilical cord – was it mine? Or Shiva’s? – was implanted in the earth; and at once, a house began to grow” (308-309). The umbilical cord is literally envisaged as a root that needs to be implanted in the earth, functioning as a metonymical connection with the past. In *The Satanic Verses*, roots become associated with navels, and the idea of putting down roots appears many times. The trope express Saladin’s desire to survive in England, though the emphasis in this novel is not on the attempt to preserve a continuity with the past, but to “implant” and “engraft” a hybrid creature. When Saladin watches the *Gardener’s World* on television, a programme about a “chimeran graft,” he imagines that the two trees bred into one metaphorize his very self: “On the *Gardeners’ World* he was shown how to achieve something called a ‘chimeran graft’ [. . .]; and although his inattention caused him to miss the names of the two trees that had been bred into one – Mulberry? Laburnum? Broom? – the tree itself made him sit up and take notice. There it palpably was, a chimera with roots, firmly planted in and growing vigorously out of a piece of English earth: a tree, he thought, capable of taking the metaphoric place of the one his father had chopped down in a distant garden in another, incompatible world. If such a tree were possible, then so was he; to too, could cohere, send down roots, survive” (406).

Not my voice, I'd never know such words I'm no classy speaker never was
never will be but this isn't my voice it's a Voice. (112, emphases in the original)

The Voice with capital V acts as the only power in the novel that is able to take control over the life and body of characters; it controls and subdues Gibreel (working his jaws, reaching to his vocal cords), who becomes a medium, a tool, far from being the “avenging migrant” as Bhabha supposed. Also, he is unable to tell where the voice comes from: “the miracle starts in his my our guts,” as if it were impossible to locate its origin. The encounter is painful, reminding the reader of the androgynous wholeness that marks Saleem's voices, and suggesting that we return to a hybrid, metamorphic world after the sterile oppositions of *Shame*.

In the very first chapter of *The Satanic Verses*, when Gibreel and Saladin are falling from the sky, a similarly painful yet miraculous force attacks Gibreel's body:

[. . .] it began in the very centre of his body and spread outwards, turning his blood to iron, changing his flesh to steel, except that it also felt like a fist that enveloped him from the outside, holding him in a way that was both unbearably tight and intolerably gentle; until finally it had conquered him totally and could work his mouth, his fingers, whatever it chose, and once it was sure of its dominion it spread outward from his body and grabbed Gibreel Farishta by the balls.

‘Fly,’ it commanded Gibreel. Sing.’ (9)

Just like in the previous episode, the Voice attacking Gibreel is painful, miraculous, and immeasurably powerful: it saves the two characters from death, helping them conquer gravity and fly towards the English shores. It is quite easy to associate this Voice with the voice of

Satan, who knows “the truth,” but discloses nothing of its nature; however, the very same powerful Voice is in the possession of Rosa Diamond, and her figure, despite her miraculous visions, is earthly enough. We might read her as an allegory commenting upon the “Satanic power” of the British Empire, but besides this trivial analogy, the association of her figure with Satan would lead nowhere. Therefore, it is the Satanic that becomes an attribute of the Voice in the text, and not vice versa; it is the Voice that seems to be the primary omnipotent entity, the entity that possesses the “truth,” just like in Rushdie’s other novels,¹²⁸ and the fact that it becomes associated with Satan in this text simply illuminates one its dimensions.

The Voice indeed parades as Logos in *The Satanic Verses*. It functions as an entity that both possesses and hides “the truth,” the way David Appelbaum presumes: as he writes, the fact that “we avoid attending to the voice that is ours reveals a hiddenness surrounding voice. The hiddenness is double. The note of imperishable recognition is hidden from the being whose voice it is; *and*, we of voice lie hiding from sounding the truth ourselves” (ix-x). Appelbaum, heavily influenced by Derrida, recognizes the ambivalence of voice, resulting from the tension between its promise to articulate “the truth,” as the most intimate attribute of the articulating person, and the inevitable distance the voice evokes in relation to that very person, the distance which alienates it from the one who articulates it, and, therefore, denies the desired moment of recognition. The voice both seems to contain and hide the “truth” about oneself, and, therefore, has a double-tongued nature, just like in Rushdie’s novel. The doubleness of the voice is indicated by the fact that the clear, articulated Logos may be interrupted by inarticulate sound effects, such as the cough, which threaten its apparently “omnipotent power.” As Appelbaum claims, “[t]he cough commonly makes its appearance as an interruption to the voicing process. It is not as pernicious as the stutter or stammer or chronic hiccup but nonetheless takes the attending audience with it. It distorts the text and

¹²⁸ The voice remained a central metaphor in Rushdie’s fiction after the fatwa as well: it also appears in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, published in 1999 (the novel is about a pop star and a songwriter) and in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*.

texture of voice with the unexpectancy of the body” (3). He regards the cough as “raw sound, unperiodic vibration, or plain noise” (3), which, besides acting as an interruption, functions as an entity that is more corporeal than the voice, and this corporeality makes it even more dangerous: “Even if suppressed the cough is never mental and cannot be truthful. The cough, therefore, is to be feared” (5). Furthermore, the cough even becomes a devilish entity in his reading: “The cough is devilish and chthonic. It interrupts God’s sermon of phonetic abundance and the soul’s self-reiteration” (6).

Though the sound appears as an interruption in *The Satanic Verses* as well, functioning as a subversive element, it never becomes a devilish and corporeal entity opposed to the crystal clear Voice. On the contrary, it is the Voice that becomes a “devilish” principle in the novel, and, despite the fact that it appears as a disembodied and free-floating entity,¹²⁹ it has corporeal effects: the voice subdues Gibreel’s body, reaching to his vocal cords and grabbing him by the balls, and it is also the voice captures him at Rosa Diamond’s mansion, dragging him by the navel. Contrary to this emphatic corporeality, the sound seems to be almost *disembodied*: we encounter the resounding echo of the Conqueror’s *ghost*, the noise of the children’s mental image in Saleem’s head, as if the only possibility of the sound to interrupt the omnipotent power of Voice consisted in retreating into an incorporeal dimension, which seems to be the last hiding space that the Voice is not entirely able to control. In my view, the body cannot really function as a site of resistance in Rushdie’s texts; it seems to be too fragmented, too weak, and too overwhelmingly subdued by the omnipresent Voice to launch a challenge of its own. Therefore, the novels are in search of other dimensions that subvert this omnipotent power, and they seem to find it in the trope of the sound, the entity that is the least affected by the Voice’s overwhelming corporeal interpellation.

¹²⁹ The motto of the novel, a quotation from Daniel Defoe’s *The History of the Devil* already locates the Voice of Satan in such a disembodied space: “Satan, being thus confined to a vagabond, wandering, unsettled condition, is without any certain abode; for though he has, in consequence of his angelic nature, a kind of empire in the liquid waste of air, yet this is certainly part of his punishment, that he is... without any fixed place, or space, allowed him to rest the sole of his foot upon” (motto).

The sound does not simply interrupt and deconstruct the false plenitude of the Voice, but it attempts to offer a plenitude of its own. For instance, when Saladin is walking on the streets of London, desiring to find the “secrets of Englishness,” he encounters magic sounds that take him closer to this secret:

Of material things, he had given his love to this city, London, preferring it to the city of his birth or to any other; had been creeping up on it, stealthily, with mounting excitement, freezing into a statue when it looked in his direction, dreaming of being the one to possess it and so, in a sense, *become* it, as when in the game of grandmother’s footsteps the child who touches the one who’s *it* [. . .] takes over that cherished identity; as, also, in the myth of the Golden Bough. London, its conglomerate nature mirroring his own, its reticence also his; its gargoyles, the ghostly footfalls in its streets of Roman feet, the honks of its departing migrant geese. (398, emphasis in the original)

Saladin’s desire to “become” English is manifested in imagining his self as one with the “sounds of Englishness”: the footfalls, the sounds of Roman footsteps, the honks of the departing geese are the secrets that he desires to possess. These sounds lead him towards a desired unisonance, or promise of initiation, a plenitude that echoes Rosa Diamond’s vision of the Norman Conquest, and constitutes the secret of a desired identification. Whereas Rosa’s *Voice* imprisoned Gibreel, the *sounds* that Saladin is in search of promise an alternative, a plenitude that evokes a more ambivalent and less controllable notion of Englishness than the version imposed upon Gibreel by Rosa’s didactic Voice.

The opposition of sound and voice reappears in several other episodes as well. Saladin’s boss, Hal Valance is, for instance, known as a person with a “Deep Throat voice”

(265), and this name does not only indicate the pitch of his voice but establishes him as an authoritative person as well. After miraculously surviving the explosion of the airplane, Saladin attempts to re-establish his earlier life, and he calls his boss to arrange his future employment. Valance briefly congratulates him on being alive, after which he fires him without further delay, for ethnic reasons: “A busy man, Hal Valance, creator of *The Aliens Show* and sole owner of the property, took exactly seventeen seconds to congratulate Chamcha on being alive before beginning to explain why this fact did not affect the show’s decision to dispense with his services” (264). Valance is not simply a ruthless and authoritative Briton, possessor of the voice of success, but he also becomes associated with the nation in the novel: “He owned a Union Jack waistcoat and insisted on flying the flag over his agency and also above the door of his Highgate home [. . .]” (266). Just like Rosa Diamond, he is an allegorical figure of Englishness, and, similarly to her, he also possesses a secret dream which is slightly at odds with his authoritative voice. After the rather brief phone call, Saladin recalls how he met Valance in his residence a few years ago, and how the self-made man led him into a room, a secret space, which showed a very different side of him:

After lunch, a surprise. Valance led him into a room in which there stood two clavichords of great delicacy and lightness. ‘I make ‘em,’ his host confessed. ‘To relax.’ [. . .] Hal Valance’s talent as a cabinet-maker was undeniable, and somehow at odds with the rest of the man. ‘My father was in the trade,’ he admitted under Chamcha’s probing, and Saladin understood that he had been granted a privileged glimpse into the only piece that remained of Valance’s original self, the Harold that derived from history and blood and not from his own frenetic brain.

When they left the secret chamber of the clavichords, the familiar Hal Valance instantly reappeared. (269)

Valance's secret chamber, which is also the spatial metaphor of his secret self, stores the musical instruments that the businessman makes in his free time, which Saladin reads as the "only pieces" associated with his original self, his blood and history. The chamber seems to be the storehouse of voices which are not to be heard (Valance fabricates the instruments, but he probably could not play them even if he wanted to), and, paradoxically, it is these "unheard melodies" that speak about his original self, as opposed to the Deep Throat Voice of the businessman. Valance's secret chamber also calls Rosa's "buried treasure chests" (129) to mind; in both cases, sounds are locked in secret spaces that the reader, just like Saladin, might only encounter for split seconds. Therefore, contrary to Appelbaum, in Rushdie, these sounds do not simply function as devilish and corporeal entities interrupting the crystal clear Voice, the Logos, the appropriator of "truth," but they seem to contain an alternative truth of their own, however momentary and hidden.

Sound Stages

This "truth," however, does not constitute a return to a hidden neo-Platonic ideal. The danger is there, yet *The Satanic Verses* manages to avoid it by putting its alternative "truths" into a theatrical context. In Rosa Diamond's case, for instance, the vision of William the Conqueror is described as a spectacle performed for the old lady, who always runs for her "opera glasses" (138) whenever something happens in her garden, watching the Norman fleet's return from the place that provides "grandstand view" (130). The reader feels that s/he is watching a performance through Rosa's eyes, like in a theatre, or opera-house, suggesting that those "essential" moments of English nationhood are nothing but spectacles performed on stage. This theatrical context subverts the desire of the sound to act as a metaphysical notion,

the antithesis of the Voice, and ensures that the novel remains “faithful” to its postmodern framework.

The sound of Roman footsteps making Saladin want to pursue the secrets of Englishness also reappears in a profoundly theatrical context in the novel. When Saladin’s colleague, Mimi Mamouljian, and her legendary lover, Billy Battuta organise a party in London, the location of which is the “giant sound stage at the Shepperton film studios” (421), where the guests “take pleasure in the huge re-creation of Dickensian London that stood within” (421), the performance is accompanied by the sound of footsteps. We meet Dickens’s heroes, intermingling with guests in the streets of London; the stage perfectly echoes the setting of his novels:

But the guests are not disposed to grumble; the reborn city, even if rearranged, still takes the breath away; most particularly in that part of the immense studio through which the river winds, the river with its fogs and Gaffer Hexam’s boat, the ebbing Thames flowing beneath two bridges, one of iron, one of stone. – Upon its cobbled banks the guests’ gay footsteps fall; and there sound mournful, misty, footfalls of ominous note. (422).

The sound of footfalls fills this simulacrum of Dickens’s London, one of the most emblematic spaces of Englishness: we hear no other voice apart from the guests’ “gay” footfalls, producing “mournful,” “misty” and “ominous” sounds. These adjectives are rather strong after the “gay” footsteps in the previous clause, suggesting that, notwithstanding the frivolity of the original act, the sound it produces is serious enough. Also, Dickens is not the only icon of Englishness that appears in this episode: the jealous Gibreel and the devilish Saladin start to perform *Othello* by Shakespeare on this heavily allegorical stage. Gibreel appears with her

beloved Allie, of whom he is terribly jealous, and Saladin, still angry with him for his behaviour at Rosa's place, and envious of her "ice queen," decides to take revenge on his old friend. It does not take long for Saladin to find out Gibreel's weakness, namely, his paranoid jealousy, after which he assumes the role of Iago, making Gibreel kill his mistress in the end: "My Chamcha may be no Ancient of Venice, my Allie no smothered Desdemona, Farishta no match for the Moor, but they will, at least, be costumed in such explanations as my understanding will allow. – And so, now, Gibreel waves in greeting; Chamcha approaches; the curtain rises on a darkening stage" (425). In other words, in "the sound stage at the Shepperton film studios" (421) we see the icons of Englishness performed in a theatrical way, just like on Rosa Diamond's porch, and the performance implies a profound rewriting (or rather, "re-enacting") of these icons. The studio acts as a closed microcosm of Englishness that contains its "secrets," and the darkening stage, hidden by the curtain that rises only at the moment when Gibreel and Saladin identify with their Shakespearean roles, appears as a Chinese box, a box that takes us closer and closer to the confined secret, just like the "bathroom-scene" in *Midnight's Children*.

Yet whereas in *Midnight's Children* the secret is an honest and semi-transcendental revelation, the discovery of the children's noise, in *The Satanic Verses*, all of these paths lead to some kind of theatricality. In another scene, for instance, we find a poet, Baal, hidden in a brothel, the most confined of spaces, in one of Ali Baba's forty jars. The scene takes place in "Jahilia,"¹³⁰ Rushdie's version of Mecca, in one of the historical chapters dreamt by Gibreel. After Mahound has conquered the town and become established as the prophet of Islam, Baal, the poet, who previously offended him with his satirical poems, needs to hide in the brothel from the wrath of his adversary. The brothel, which is called "The Curtain," referring both to the veiling of women and the theatricality of the space, is ordered to be closed by Mahound,

¹³⁰ The term means ignorance, referring to the "ignorance" of Mecca before Mohammed's arrival and spreading of Islam.

yet he grants a short period of transition for Jahilians, understanding that they need time to give up their sinful habits. Due to the customers' indiscretion, "The Curtain" becomes the storehouse of whispered secrets, the space where all the sins of Jahilia are locked:

The absolute indiscretion of their tongues, induced by the gay abandon of the whores' caresses and by the clients' knowledge that their secrets would be kept, gave the eavesdropping poet, myopic and hard of hearing as he was, a better insight into contemporary affairs than he could possibly have gained if he'd still been free to wander the newly puritanical streets of the town. (377)

Baal not only gains an insight into contemporary affairs, but also hears about the most outrageous violations of Mahound's new regulations:

What Baal learned at The Curtain:

From the disgruntled butcher Ibrahim came the news that in spite of the new ban on pork the skin-deep converts of Jahilia were flocking to his back door to buy the forbidden meat in secret, 'sales are up,' he murmured while mounting his chosen lady, 'black pork prices are high: but damn it, these new rules have made my work tough. A pig is not an easy animal to slaughter in secret, without noise,' and thereupon he began some squealing of his own, for reasons, it is to be presumed, of pleasure rather than pain. (378)

Amidst the noise of The Curtain, secrets are whispered: the place acts as another storehouse of the forbidden, the resistant, which subverts Mahound's public Voice. And this place, just like the previous realms of the sound, also becomes theatrical, a stage where different

alternatives are enacted. Besides the very name of the brothel, several acts of theatrical nature are performed in this place. The twelve whores of the brothel, for instance, in order to increase the number of their clients, take up the roles of Mahound's twelve wives, thus The Curtain becomes the profane and theatrical version of Mohammed's harem (this is one of the reasons why the novel was considered blasphemous by Muslim critics). All the customers who enter this enchanted realm have to wear masks, as if they took part in a collective, secret performance: "All customers of The Curtain were issued with masks, and Baal, watching the circling masked figures from a high balcony, was satisfied. There were more ways than one of refusing to Submit" (381). Just like Rosa Diamond, Baal watches the performance from a first class seat, considering it as the most profound intervention into Mahound's order, the most effective performance that challenges the power of his omnipotent Voice.

The space that Baal chooses to hide in reminds the reader of Saleem's hiding place in the bathroom:

[. . .] when Khalid's guards arrived to search the premises the eunuchs led them on a dizzy journey around that overground catacomb of contradictions and irreconcilable routes, until the soldiers' heads were spinning, and after looking inside thirty-nine stone urns and finding nothing but unguents and pickles they left, cursing heavily, never suspecting that there was a fortieth corridor down which they had never been taken, a fortieth urn inside which there hid, like a thief, the quivering, pajama-wetting poet whom they sought. (377)

Baal is hiding in Ali Baba's fortieth urn, just like Saleem in the washing chest, and both of these hiding places function as Chinese boxes, or Russian dolls, making the reader believe that they are taking us closer and closer to a presumed secret: The Curtain itself functions as a

confined space, which contains the jar, the most confined of spaces, which, in turn, contains Baal, the very principle of subversion.

Yet whereas what Saleem discovers in that space is the children's noise, Baal is led towards other kinds of discoveries. After the whores identify with the roles of Mahound's wives, realizing that they also need a husband, they ask Baal to wed them. Shortly after this, Baal assumes the role of Mahound in their eyes. Finding this arrangement irresistible, he falls prey "to the seductions of becoming the secret, profane mirror of Mahound; and he had begun, once again, to write" (384). That is, Baal, who had dedicated his entire life to satirizing Mahound, and then had to find the most confined of Chinese boxes to escape from his wrath, becomes the secret, profane mirror of his very antagonist. And it is precisely this identification, paradoxically, that helps him to regain the ability he has lost years ago, namely, the ability to write. In his verses, unsurprisingly, he also assumes the voice of Mahound: "The poetry that came was the sweetest he had ever written. Sometimes when he was with Ayesha he felt a slowness come over him, a heaviness, and he had to lie down. 'It's strange,' he told her. 'It is as if I see myself standing beside myself. And I can make him, the standing one, speak: then I get up and write down his verses'" (385). We could say that in *The Satanic Verses*, it is this imitation that takes the place of the hesitant secrets and semi-Platonic sounds of *Midnight's Children*. The spatial metaphors guide the reader towards the "secret" that acts as a challenge of the Voice, yet whereas in the previous novel we were led towards a miraculous momentary revelation, here, instead, we find a simulacrum, providing a space for characters to perform theatrical roles.

In my view, it is this theatrical yet productive doubling that marks the emergence of nations in this novel, or, more precisely, the emergence of their postmodern, performative variants. These nations are no longer content to function as remnants of a momentary miracle, but they become part of a self-conscious strategy that uses the means of theatricality to assert

difference. In this sense, this novel enacts Rushdie's claim about the "Empire writing back" more than either of the two other novels in the trilogy (it is also no wonder that Bhabha became interested in it). Whereas the sounds of *Midnight's Children* are reminiscent of metaphysical aspirations, and the Voice functions as a clear-cut pedagogical entity, *The Satanic Verses*, without depriving these metaphors of their basic features, shifts the emphasis, and makes the sound more theatrical, and, therefore, less prone to acting as the innocent antithesis of the devilish Voice, but also more capable of surviving in this postmodern world. Furthermore, as part of this shift, the voice is also transformed, becoming an entity that can be appropriated, used against itself, just as Bhabha's theory of mimicry presumes. Both metaphors become more fluid, and, therefore, there is less invested in the sounds of this novel than in *Midnight's Children*, and there is less at stake. Perhaps we could even say that the novel is less daring in this respect, despite its obvious courage concerning religious issues.

At this point, it is necessary that we return to Bhabha once more. Contrary to his argument, in my view, it is not even Gibreel who acts as the primary instigator of the migrant's challenge, but Saladin: whereas Gibreel becomes lost amidst Rosa's tales and then in his "Archangelic mission," never really succeeding in colonizing London, it is Saladin whose gestures resemble the theatrical endeavours of Baal. Saladin Chamcha (whose name echoes, besides the obvious reference to Kafka's Gregor *Samsa* and the Sultan Saladdin, that of *Salman* Rushdie as well as *Saleem* Sinai), before Hal Valance fires him, works for his TV programme called *The Alien's Show*, where his task is to imitate voices and inarticulate noises: "If you wanted to know how your ketchup bottle should talk in its television commercial, if you were unsure as to the ideal voice for your packet of garlic-flavoured crisps, he was your very man. [. . .] On the radio he could convince an audience that he was Russian, Chinese, Sicilian, the President of the United States" (60). Due to this peculiar talent, he becomes "the Man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice" (60), recalling the number of

children in *Midnight's Children*, and suggesting that it is he who possesses the magic of voice in this novel, not Gibreel Farishta. Despite the fact that he is like a parrot, a mimic man, literally, it is Saladin who is able to act, to *use* his voice to challenge the pedagogical version of Englishness; the “magic” that he possesses, far from being the larger-than-life magic of the midnight’s children, simply indicates this ability. With her colleague, Mimi Mamouljian, he “ruled the airwaves of Britain” (60), as if their voice enacted the cacophony of the British nation. Also, when Mimi suggests, jokingly, that the two of them should get married, she envisages their union in terms of nations: “We should get married sometimes, when you’re free,” Mimi once suggested to him. “You and me, we could be the United Nations” (60). Saladin becomes a mimic voice in the novel, impersonating the myriad accents that colonise Britain, and it is his mimicry that challenges Rosa’s pedagogical voice claiming that “in an ancient land like England there was no room for new stories” (144), not the paralysed gestures of the helpless and innocent Gibreel.

Besides the names of the Sultan Saladdin, Gregor Samsa, and Rushdie, Saladin’s name also becomes associated with Satan himself. His voice (which lets him down only when he returns to India¹³¹), just like Satan’s, intervenes into the narrative and deceives his characters.¹³² Also, when Saladin assumes the role of Iago in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, he

¹³¹ On his way back to India, Saladin realises that both the face and the voice that he carefully constructed in England let him down: “Mr Saladin Chamcha had constructed this face with care – it had taken him several years to get it just right – and for many more years now he had thought of it simply as *his own* – indeed, he had forgotten what he had looked like before it. Furthermore, he had shaped himself a voice to go with the face, a voice whose languid, almost lazy vowels contrasted disconcertingly with the sawn-off abruptness of the consonants. The combination of face and voice was a potent one; but, during his recent visit to his home town, his first such visit in fifteen years (the exact period, I should observe, of Gibreel Farishta’s film stardom), there had been strange and worrying developments. It was unfortunately the case that his voice (the first to go) and, subsequently, his face itself, had begun to let him down” (33). The “potent” combination of face and voice that Saladin constructs for himself in England serves as a radical tool in his hand to appropriate “the Voice” of Englishness, yet the fact that these let him down when he returns to India emphasises the simulated nature of both, underlining the hypothesis that it is the theatrical that becomes potent in *The Satanic Verses*.

¹³² Satan also becomes associated with the writer, Salman Rushdie himself, who exercises an omnipotent power over his characters, and deceives them the way he pleases. In a memorable episode, for instance, when Gibreel is at pains to find answers to his questions, an apparition appears to him who possesses an omnipotent voice, and whose description resembles that of Salman Rushdie: “He saw, sitting on the bed, a man of about the same age as himself, of medium height, fairly heavily built, with salt-and-pepper beard cropped close to the line of the jaw. What struck him most was that the apparition was balding, seemed to suffer from dandruff and wore

appropriates the role of Satan and whispers his own verses of jealousy to Gibreel over the telephone. The childlike poems he recites, using his Thousand and One Voices, become the secular version of “the satanic verses” that drive Gibreel mad:

One by one, they dripped into Gibreel’s ears, weakening his hold on the real world, drawing him little by little into their deceitful web, so that little by little their obscene, invented women began to coat the real woman like a viscous, green film, and in spite of his protestations to the contrary he started slipping away from her; and then it was time for the little, satanic verses that made him mad.

Roses are red, violets are blue,

Sugar never tasted sweet as you. (445)

Saladin has the power to appropriate “the Voice,” suggesting that this trope is no longer an intangible pedagogical entity, just as the sound is no longer a semi-transcendental category in this novel. The tropes are transformed, and the metamorphoses they go through are driven by the desire to survive. The sound does not aspire to present a “pure” alternative to the Voice, yet the Voice does not remain in the hands of the pedagogical discourse either; both tropes are shifting, metamorphosing, fluctuating, and it is exactly this process that makes *The Satanic Verses* a novel of survival, in contrast with *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame*. The shifting nature of both tropes prevents the inevitable destruction of sounds,¹³³ and opens a path

glasses. This was not the Almighty he had expected” (318). (For the reading of this episode see Gayatri C. Spivak’s “Reading *The Satanic Verses*.”) Gibreel is at pains to find out whether the apparition is God or Satan: “‘Who are you?’ he asked with interest. [. . .] ‘Ooparvala,’ the apparition answered. ‘The Fellow Upstairs.’ ‘How do I know you’re not the other One,’ Gibreel asked craftily, ‘Neechayvala, the Guy from Underneath?’” (318). Satan/Salman, of course, gives no answer to Gibreel, and it turns out only two chapters later that it was he who deceived the confused Archangel: “I sat on Alleluia Cone’s bed and spoke to the superstar, Gibreel. *Ooparvala* or *Neechayvala*, he wanted to know, and I didn’t enlighten him [. . .]” (409).

¹³³ In *Midnight’s Children*, as we have seen, the hesitant intervention of the children’s sound is destroyed when it is transformed into audible and comprehensible voice: the magic is replaced by selfish quarrels, the Voice of

towards a peculiar synthesis between the innocent plenitude of Saleem and the cynical lack of *Shame*.

Whereas Saleem disintegrates at the end of the novel, and Omar explodes, similarly to Sufiya herself, in *The Satanic Verses*, Saladin Chamcha survives. Both main characters return to India in the final chapter (they literally perform a flight back to “Paradise,” mirroring the one we have seen in the very beginning¹³⁴): Saladin goes home to pay a last visit to his dying father, while Gibreel returns “to pick up the threads of his film career” (538) after the “shipwreck” he has suffered in London (Allie, his lover, after realizing how incurable his madness is, refuses to take him back). Unfortunately, Allie also travels to Bombay with an international team of mountaineers, providing an opportunity for the enraged Gibreel’s final countdown: driven totally insane by Saladin’s satanic verses, he fulfils his role as Othello, and kills both Allie and himself. Gibreel is unable to return to India, or to regain his sense of self: he becomes so dislocated in England that the return simply smashes his already disintegrating ego to its final shards. Saladin, on the other hand, seems to be able to juggle with the positions he is to take: after the death of his father, the final image the reader sees is him departing with his Indian lover, Zeeny Vakil: “‘My place,’ Zeeny offered. ‘Let’s get the hell out of here.’ ‘I’m coming,’ he answered her, and turned away from the view” (547). The novel ends with this positive image, as if a new path had opened up for Saladin: regaining his original name, Salahuddin Chamchawala, led by his Indian lover, it seems that Saladin, the author of the “satanic verses” and appropriator of the Voice, is embarking on a flight, or, at least, walk, towards his Indian self. Perhaps we can read this image as a rather conventional ending suggesting that he has finally thrown away his masks and attempts to make peace with his

Indira Gandhi orders the sterilization of children, and so on. In *The Satanic Verses*, instead of this linear transformation of the performative into the pedagogical, we see a constantly shifting metamorphosis, and this saves the day for the miracle.

¹³⁴ As Paul Brians remarks, the names of the airplanes, Bostan, the plane that takes them to England, and Gulistan, the one that takes them back, refer to the traditional heavens of Islam.

http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/anglophone/satanic_verses/1.html

innermost self, yet the fact that he is led by Zeeny suggests that he is about to enter a path that is prescribed for him by others, just like the one he took in England, and the role he identifies with is not less tainted by mimicry than that of the “Man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice.”

In other words, it is mimicry and compromise that survive in this novel: whereas the unbending, extreme position that Gibreel embodies is doomed to burn itself up, Saladin manages to stay alive in England as well as in India. The fate of the two characters seems to provide an answer to the question that Mahound is asked in the middle of the novel, one of the most crucial questions asked in *The Satanic Verses*: is it heroic (yet unbending) perfectionism or less courageous (yet sensible) compromise that helps to move the world forward?

Any new idea, Mahound, is asked two questions. The first is asked when it's weak: WHAT KIND OF AN IDEA ARE YOU? Are you the kind that compromises, does deals, accommodates itself to society, aims to find a niche, to survive; or are you the cussed, bloody-minded, ramrod-backed type of damnfool notion that would rather break than sway with the breeze? – The kind that will almost certainly, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, be smashed to bits; but, the hundredth time, will change the world. (335)

The death of Gibreel at the end of the novel provides an answer to this question, which is no longer only concerned with the birth of Islam, but becomes an existentialist issue that all characters face: Saladin, the compromising, mimic man is the only one who is able to stay alive in the postmodern world of Rushdie's fiction.

What does this suggest about the nations imagined in this novel? First of all, the fact that compromise is the price of survival in *The Satanic Verses* makes it impossible for the kind of nation we have seen in *Midnight's Children*, the larger-than-life national allegory of

Saleem Sinai, to exist. Instead, we find less romantic yet more viable options: the most “authentic” sounds of the English nation become theatrical, when Rosa Diamond observes the return of William the Conqueror with her opera glasses, for instance, suggesting that nations become positions for the characters to identify with. When Saladin returns to India, and sets out on his new path leading towards the heart of his homeland as well as a renewed sense of self (“[i]t seemed that in spite of all his wrong-doing, weakness, guilt – in spite of his humanity – he was getting another chance” [547]), he is not going towards a more authentic community, a community in which he can finally get rid of the masks he was wearing in England, but he is simply *led* towards another option. And this is why Bhabha’s theory concerning the “revenge of the migrant upon the English nation” does not hold; perhaps the novel can be read as an intervention into Englishness (the portrayal of Margaret Thatcher as “Maggie the Witch” burned in a large microwave is not the only instance of its criticism of England), but the main characters are far from being “avenging migrants”: Gibreel is a medium traversed by others’ voices, while Saladin is simply looking for ways to survive.

The Final Judgement

Even though the last sentence of *The Satanic Verses* offers an affirmative image of survival, this novel, similarly to the previous two, is not devoid of apocalyptic scenarios: Saladin’s “triumphant” walk towards his new role is preceded by two apocalypses, just like in *Shame*. The first takes place in London, in a quasi-realistic chapter, and the second in Jahilia, that is, in Mecca, in a historical one. In London, the apocalypse appears to be Gibreel’s revenge upon the faithless city: after walking in the city with his trumpet called Azrael, the exterminating Angel, he imagines that it is God’s wrath that set the city on fire, whereas, of course, there is a completely logical explanation (the fire is caused by “secret agents” with the

aim of killing Saladin's wife, who possesses too much information about the secret dealings of the Metropolitan Police). Nevertheless, Gibreel envisages the flames as manifestations of a purifying fire, calling to mind the great fire of 1666, which put an end to the plague and provided a new life for the city's inhabitants.¹³⁵

Saladin almost dies in this fire: attempting to rescue his friends, he breaks into the burning Shaandar Café, and it is Gibreel, the Archangel who rescues him in a moment of profound forgiveness:

Gibreel lets fall his trumpet; stoops; frees Saladin from the prison of the fallen beam; and lifts him in his arms. [. . .] Gibreel Farishta begins softly to exhale, a long, continuous exhalation of extraordinary duration, and as his breath blows towards the door it slices through the smoke and fire like a knife; – and Saladin Chamcha, gasping and fainting, with a mule inside his chest, seems to see – but will ever afterward be unsure if it was truly so – the fire parting before them like the red sea it has become, and the smoke dividing also, like a curtain or a veil; – until there lies before them a clear pathway to the door [. . .]. (468)

Gibreel and Saladin enter upon a path of miracles and forgiveness: Gibreel's breath parting the flames like Moses parted the red sea suggests that Saladin's survival at the end of the novel is not simply the survival of the prosaic defined against the miraculous (without Gibreel's help, he would have died at the Shaandar Café), yet the fact that the miraculous parting immediately becomes associated with the parting of *a curtain or a veil* suggests that

¹³⁵ There are quite a few references in the text to the great fire of London: the flames are described as “most horrid, malicious, bloody flames, not like the fine flame of an ordinary fire” (464), and, as we learn from Brians' notes, the quotation is from Samuel Pepy's description of the fire of 1666; also, when Saladin enters the burning Shaandar Café, a “pestilential wind drives him back” (466); and finally, at the end of the chapter, Gibreel imagines that the fire has indeed been a “purifying fire” (467). All of these allusions suggest that the fire is imagined, in parallel with the Great Fire of 1666, as a painful yet purifying apocalypse that acts as the “final judgement” upon the city.

this miracle is not devoid of theatrical aspects either. The magic is immediately associated with theatricality, which suggests that it is performed for us and becomes located in a dimension where magic can be practiced without threatening the prosaic order of the world, the logic of the Metropolitan Police and Saladin's reasoning, for instance. (One of the inhabitants of the Café, for instance, gives a perfectly rational explanation: "What has happened here in Brickhall tonight is a socio-political phenomenon. Let's not fall into the trap of some damn mysticism" [467]). Quite a safe place for magic indeed, a place that ensures the survival of this quality in the postmodern world of the novel, similarly to those miraculous dimensions of nations that point beyond their mere existence as subject positions for characters to identify with.

A similar ambivalence defines the apocalypse that takes place at the end of "The Parting of the Arabian Sea," the last historical section of *The Satanic Verses*. The inhabitants of the village of Titlipur set off on foot pilgrimage to Mecca, led by Ayesha, the butterfly girl, who might be the last prophet as well as a witch – this never becomes clear in the novel. As Ayesha informs her devoted pilgrims, the Archangel Gabriel has promised to part the waters of the Arabian Sea, so that they can reach Mecca on foot. Just like in the previous chapter, we are expecting a miracle, and this time, one profoundly religious by nature. Several characters defy Ayesha and doubt her power; Mirza Saeed, for instance, the anglicised zamindar, constantly offers to fly them to Mecca, or, at least, wants her to join him in his comfortable air-conditioned Mercedes. Finally, Ayesha manages to convert almost everyone except Mirza; though the spectators on the seaside simply observe a crowd willingly disappearing in the water ("[a]lmost all together, making no visible attempt to save themselves, they dropped beneath the water's surface" [503]), even the most cynical survivors testify that the miracle took place: "This was the testimony of the Sarpanch of Titlipur, Muhammad Din: 'Just when my strength had failed and I thought I would surely die there in the water, I saw it with my

own eyes; I saw the sea divide, like hair being combed; and they were all there, far away, walking away from me” (504). Mirza Saeed, however, is not convinced; he walks home to Titlipur, mourning his dead wife, and finds the village devastated:

Moths had eaten the punkahs of Peristan and the library had been consumed by a billion hungry worms. When he turned on the taps, snakes oozed out instead of water, and creepers had twined themselves around the four-poster bed in which Viceroy had once slept. It was as if time had accelerated in his absence, and centuries had somehow elapsed instead of months, so that when he touched the giant Persian carpet rolled up in the ballroom it crumbled under his hand, and the baths were full of frogs with scarlet eyes. At night there were jackals howling [. . .] On the last night of his life he heard a noise like a giant crushing a forest beneath his feet, and smelled a stench like the giant’s fart, and he realized that the tree was burning. He got out of his chair and staggered dizzily down to the garden to watch the fire, whose flames were consuming histories, memories, genealogies, purifying the earth, and coming towards him to set him free [. . .] (506)

The description first recalls the ten plagues of Egypt, suggesting that Mirza is being punished for his faithlessness, and then it terminates in profoundly apocalyptic imagery: the great tree is burning, recalling the “purifying” fire of London, the apocalyptic judgement of the city. The vertigo of burning “histories, memories, genealogies” echoes the opening scene, the explosion of Bostan, which leaves “broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mothertongues” (4) floating in the air, and it also brings Gibreel’s song to the reader’s mind, the very first sentence of the novel: “[t]o be born again, first you have to die” (3). This is the main issue at stake in the case of the apocalypses as well: whether they lead towards rebirth

after death and give a second chance to those who survive, or simply revert to a final nothingness, like the apocalypse concluding *Shame*. The two apocalypses in *The Satanic Verses* are different in this respect: both open paths towards a new life, yet whereas in the London episode this path seems to be leading towards the future, however opaque, since the story of the two main characters continues in the final chapter of the novel, the apocalypse that concludes the historical sections terminates the story of Mirza and Ayesha. The final image that we see is that of the zamindar's death:

He was a fortress with clanging gates. – He was drowning. – She [Ayesha] was drowning, too. He saw the water fill her mouth, heard it begin to gurgle into her lungs. Then something within him refused that, made a different choice, and at that instant that his heart broke, he opened.

His body split apart from his adam's-apple to his groin, so that she could reach deep within him, and now she was open, they all were, and at the moment of their opening the waters parted, and they walked to Mecca across the bed of the Arabian Sea. (507)

The moment of opening is also the moment of death: “at the instant that his heart broke, he opened” (507). Perhaps this apocalypse also promises rebirth, but only in the religious sense, in an afterlife; the characters involved in these chapters get no second chance in the secular world of the novel. Without the safety valve of theatricality, which seems to have “saved” the new path that opened for Saladin in the previous chapter, we are inevitably led towards death; Mirza dies, together with all the inhabitants of Titlipur (since the imagery also evokes a profound union with those who already died in the Arabian Sea: “at the moment of their opening the waters parted, and they walked to Mecca across the bed of the Arabian Sea” [507]).

The presence of the two apocalypses in the novel suggests that the miraculous cannot survive in *The Satanic Verses* without the safety-valve of theatricality. It did not survive in *Midnight's Children* either, as we have seen, yet *The Satanic Verses* seems to have found a new “trick” to keep it alive in its fragmenting, metamorphosing, postmodern fictional world, and this alternative seems to be more viable than the larger-than-life allegorical construction that Saleem has created. The nations this novel imagines are inserted into this miraculously theatrical endeavour, and they do not only appear as subject positions to mimic or identify with, but they also have a secret dimension that points beyond mimicry. A peculiar synthesis indeed: *The Satanic Verses*, the novel of migration, metamorphoses, and dislocation, also acts as a novel of nations, and it is exactly this eclectic and metamorphosing framework that provides a space for the nation in the postmodern which does not only evoke a momentary promise, but also points towards *survival*.

Conclusion

My dissertation has investigated a paradox: reading three novels by Salman Rushdie, I have analysed the ambivalent space that the nation occupies in postmodernism. With the help of Walter Benjamin, I have argued that the structure of the modern nation is split, and whereas this split remains hidden in the discourse of the modern nation, it becomes manifest in Rushdie's postmodern texts. For this reason, the postmodern nation is more ambivalent and less confident than its modern counterpart, yet it no longer wants to hide its ambiguous and insecure facets. Instead of wanting to parade as a seamless entity, the postmodern nation recognizes its limits, and instead of attempting to make up for the split with the help of a national pedagogy, it is able to challenge pedagogical discourses.

Unlike Anderson's imagined communities, postmodern nations always carry some traces of subjectivity, and this makes them both more corporeal and more vulnerable than modern nations were. Anderson's communities function as grand visions of a collective

imaginary, yet, as we have seen, instead of giving room to subjective voices, they presuppose the existence of an omnipotent, disembodied Cogito. In Rushdie's novels, however, nations are always closely related to the subject: in *Midnight's Children* an alternative vision of India is located in Saleem's head; in *The Satanic Verses*, England first appears as Rosa's vision of William the Conqueror, then as Saladin's "hallucination" of Roman footsteps. Always associated with some kind of sound or noise, the postmodern nation never functions as an all-encompassing vision; exactly the other way round, it seems to occupy the margins of the symbolic world.

Rushdie's three novels give different answers to how to handle this precarious entity: located in the context of magic, noises and sounds allegorizing the nation always have to find a hiding space which provides temporary shelter for them. Nations get a chance to launch an attack on the pedagogical rhetoric depending on how well they manage to hide: in *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's nose provides a secure place for the children's noise, born as a disarticulate, pre-symbolic entity in the warm and safe washing chest. The more disarticulate the noises are, the more chance they have against the pedagogical discourse: when the children's noise becomes intelligible speech, they lose their ability to challenge the rhetoric of politicians. In the schizophrenic world of *Shame*, no such hiding space is available: things are locked in that novel as well, like the names of the three sisters, or Sufiya Zinobia in the attic, yet these spaces do not provide a shelter, but simply repress any alternative that might have emerged in the novel. The world of *Shame* is too sterile, too torn by binary oppositions to have room for alternative voices. And finally, in *The Satanic Verses*, we have seen a peculiar synthesis of the options offered by the previous two novels; the plenitude of *Midnight's Children* and the lack of *Shame* return in a hybrid embrace and offer a new vision of subjectivity: as opposed to the previous texts, *The Satanic Verses* ends with the image of survival. This indicates a more self-conscious attitude towards the nation than the miraculous

yet rather naïve allegory of the children, as if the noise metaphor became more mature in this novel, ready to face the world without the shelter that the children needed.

I have proposed to use the androgyny metaphor to describe the moment when the performative nation comes to life in Rushdie's fiction. In his novels androgyny functions as a temporary challenge of binary oppositions, as opposed to the discourse of the modern nation, which uses this fantasy to support the pedagogical rhetoric of the nation as an undivided, seamless category, hiding the split at its heart. In Rushdie's novels, however, androgyny helps the postmodern nation to challenge the pedagogical rhetoric of politicians and official national histories. Though the nations that the three novels imagine are different, the rhetorical reading of these texts suggests that there is a space for a peculiar nation in the postmodern, which no longer inherits the structure of the modern nation, and no longer wants to parade as a seamless entity. In *Midnight's Children* this nation needs protection, while in *The Satanic Verses* it has to compromise, yet none of these nations sacrifice subjectivity for the sake of an ideal perfection, and this makes them profoundly postmodern.

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