SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *THE MOOR'S LAST SIGH*: 'PEELING OFF HISTORY' AS THE NECESSITY OF BECOMING AN INDIVIDUAL

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Abstract: As a postcolonial writer, Salman Rushdie is preoccupied with re-conceptualizing the identities of postcolonial migrant subjects as hybrid, often straddling two opposite cultures. The Moor's Last Sigh's concern lies with defining "palimpsest" identity, an instance of the traces colonial history has left on the colonial/postcolonial subject. At the same time, placed under the unbearable "burden" of history, torn between his commitments to multiple traditions, the individual strives for freedom, love and authenticity. The main character of the novel, Moraes Zogoiby (the Moor) embodies the search for an authentic identity among the many palimpsests of the divisive colonial history.

Keywords: postcolonialism, hybridity, palimpsest identity, authenticity, individualization

1. Introduction

Written in exile and under house arrest, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) can be read first and foremost as an allegory of Rushdie's own condition as a writer living in hiding under the threat of death[1]: the narrator, Moraes Zogoiby, recounts his escape from imprisonment by his mother's spurned lover Vasco Miranda. Attempting to comply with Vasco's demand that he should write his autobiography or else face death, he compares himself both to Scheherezade, under pressure to keep telling stories in order to save her life, and to Martin Luther[2], nailing his theses on the door at Wittenberg in protest against the Catholic Church.

In a similar fashion to *Midnight's Children*, the novel works on multiple levels: through the first person perspective of Moraes Zogoiby it traces the downfall of the Zogoiby family and at the same time fictionalises the rise of Hindu nationalism (the Hindutva movement) which followed the Emergency of Indira Gandhi. On the other hand, the novel's concern with multiplicity and hybridity as postcolonial issues is mirrored in its conceptualization of "palimpsest" identities. The divisions engendered by colonial history and the inability of postcolonial individuals to shake off the burden of the past are again posited as the historical roots of contemporary evils like Hindu right wing extremism. If Saleem Sinai was born into a family of Indian Muslims (to discover later that he was the offspring of mixed English-Indian parentage), Moraes Zogoiby is the hybrid descendant of a Catholic mother (Aurora) and a Jewish father (Abraham), calling himself, in a manner that echoes Joyce's description of Leopold Bloom as a Jewgreek in *Ulysses*, a "cathjew" (428). His mother Aurora, India's greatest artist, comes from a Portuguese family related to the 15th century

1 After the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, the Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini pronounced a fatwa (death punishment) against Salman Rushdie.

2 The Moor's identification with Luther may be open to several interpretations: Luther stands for protest and radicalism (as one side of the Moor's family does), but also for the division of the Catholic Church (paralleling the divisions inside Moraes' family and nation). Finally, as the novel is written in the form of the Moor's autobiography, Luther is linked to confession as a Christian practice with which Moraes compares his effort.

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explorer and colonizer Vasco da Gama, while his father, a Cochin Jew, may possibly be the illegitimate offspring of the last sultan of Granada, Boabdil.

2. The divided postcolonial subject

The divisions in the Moor's family reflect both the internal divisions in his personality and the religious and political factionalism that marks the beginning of communalist conflict- Rushdie started writing the novel after the riots that followed the destruction of the Babri Mosque[3], a major Muslim shrine in Ayodhya. His ancestry is also a mark of cultural difference: as a Christian-Jew, Moraes belongs to a minority, and his exploitation by Raman Fielding in the course of the novel points to the way Hindu nationalist politics chose to deal with minorities in the 1990s. The Moor's family line illustrates both the wonderful plurality of India's many ethnic and religious groups and the status of minorities in a new, post-independence nation.

Aged 36, yet burdened with the body of a 72 year old man (he is doomed to go through life at double-speed), Moraes looks back at the end of his life upon his deeply-rifted family, trying to come to terms with its ruin. He traces the history of his family as far back as his great-grandparents, the da Gamas. Through the da Gamas, Rushdie makes an inventory of the conflicting attitudes to British colonialism that later led to factionalism, the rise of Hindu nationalism and communalism. Aurora's grandmother Epiphania, honouring her rich husband's illustrious ancestor, takes up the spice trade inaugurated by da Gama and is understandably blind to colonialism's exploitative side. Her complicity in the imperialist enterprise makes her a willing subject of the British administration, whom she supports politically almost as devotedly as she follows her Portuguese Catholic faith. She has completely internalized the colonizer's attitude, believing that the departure of the British would amount to a loss of identity. To her husband Francisco, a nationalist and a progressive fighting for independence, she replies:

> 'What are we but Empire's children? British have given us everything, isn't it? - Civilization, law, order, too much. Even your spices that stink up the house they buy out of their generosity, putting clothes on backs and food on children's plates. Then why speakofy such treason and filthy up my children's ears with what-all Godless bunk?' (18)

Francisco, however, refuses to share his wife's justifications of the power abuse and the oppression of the British colonizers. He demands home rule for India, resting his case on the ruthless economic exploitation of the subcontinent by its colonizers:

> 'Taxes doubled! Our youngsters dying in British uniform! The nation's wealth is being shipped off, madam: at home our people starve, but British Tommy is utilizing our wheat, rice, jute and coconut products. I personally am required to send out goods below cost-

3 The Bharatiya Janata Party (the main Hindu party in office) planned the demolition of the Babri Mosque, a site disputed by Hindu, Muslims and Jainists. Its destruction was carried out during a Hindu nationalist demonstration in 1992. After this event, the country was rocked by communal riots, in which more than 2,000 people died. In Pakistan and Bangladesh many Hindu women were raped by Muslims in retaliation for the destruction of the mosque.

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price. Our mines are being emptied: salpetre, manganese, mica. […] nation going to pot.' (18)

Epiphania and Francisco embody two different attitudes to British colonialism, which their children Camoens and Aires will inherit. On one side of the divide stand Epiphania and Aires as reactionary conservatives- they were for " England, God, philistinism, the old ways, a quiet life" (18), while on the other Francisco and Camoens represent the radical "virtues of nationalism, reason, art, innovation, and above all, in those days, of protest." (18-9) These familial divisions will resurface in every generation, albeit in a slightly different form; the death of Francisco, nor any other death for that matter will prove capable of putting an end to the conflict. As Moraes acknowledges: "This, too, is part of my inheritance: the grave settles no quarrels." (27) As familial and national[4] history are made to mirror each other, the blood baths of communal riots stem from the same old wounds and reproduce themselves in the same ways as the rifts in the Moor's family. The partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan after Independence is paralleled by the division of the da Gama business and estate after the conflicts of the Lobos and the Menezes clans. Aurora's mother Belle decides to separate the company in two, disregarding Francisco's will (which stipulated that Gama Trading Industry should be run on a fifty-fifty basis by the two brothers Aires and Camoens). "Divide, and maybe the sickness can be contained in one half only. If we do not live separately, we will die together" (41) says Belle, echoing the arguments put forward by the Muslim founders[5] of Pakistan. She divides the old house on Cabral Island "from deepest bottom to highest top" (41) Along with the boundaries used as demarcations between adverse territories, the things are also split up between the two households: "the old family sets of linen, cutlery, crockery were all summarily divorced, down to the last tea spoon, pillow-slip and quarter-plate." Animals have to follow the enigmatic whims of their human masters: "even the lizards on the walls were captured, and evenly distributed on both sides of the great divide." (42) This is how artificial boundaries become natural, in the end. The division of space is closely followed by the break-up of time, as Belle, in the absence of a second kitchen, "put up a chart of hours on the wall that bisected the week, day by day", allotting alternative days for cooking to each side of the family. In her first mural fresco Aurora paints Mother India with Belle's face, and Belle's symbolic gesture of dividing the family estate is also transferred on Mother India, who " loved and betrayed and ate and destroyed and again loved her children, and with whom the children's passionate conjoining and eternal quarrel stretched long beyond the grave" (60-1)

Conflict runs like a red thread through the novel: Moraes's parents, Aurora and Abraham, after a brief interlude of passionate love come to hate one another because of their vastly different personalities (they represent another long-standing conflict, that between the Christians and the Jews, leading to the mass torture and genocide of the Holocaust). Abraham

4 The nation is understood as a family (Rushdie frequently uses Mother India to stand for the country). This construal of nation as a community of descent (ethnic nationalism) rather than a community of assent (civic nationalism) is questioned throughout the novel.

5 Muhhamad Ali Jinnah, responding to Muslim fears of marginalization from a Hindu government, advocated the creation of a separate Muslim state. Jinnah's urgent demands for Pakistan, which led to a rather sudden Partition and many violent incidents, came from the fact that he was suffering from terminal tuberculosis. Like the Moor, he was running against the clock of his biology and wanted to see his dream fulfilled before dying.

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is a business-minded pragmatist, who redeems the declining family business by transferring it to Bombay. There he will become a lord of the underworld of crime, trafficking in girl prostitutes, arms and even nuclear weapons, dealing in drugs and speculating in real estate. In sharp contrast to her level-headed husband, Aurora is depicted as an artist of genius, a complex, often conflicting personality. She shows the readers another face of Mother India[6]: plural, sophisticated, by her artistic genius able to offer the most inclusive view of modern India. Her vision charts the historical transformations of India, starting from King Gondophares and the Apostle Thomas, Taj Mahal and the battle of Srirangapatnam, to modern history, All-India Congress and the Muslim League. She also engages with the Boabdil theme, using her son to pose for a rewriting of the story set in an imaginary Mooristan- a place where different realities meet. Mooristan is depicted as an allegorical counterpart to a post-independence India, dominated by prejudice, dissent and fundamentalism. Yet, although her painting begins with the huge murals depicting the whole cultural and religious history of India, after she and the Moor grow apart, her work becomes darker, more fractured. In a review of the novel Coetzee calls Aurora "a distracted" mother, who "suffers intermittent remorse for not loving her children enough, but prefers finally to see them through the lens of her art." (www.nybooks.com) Aurora's palimpsest paintings, in which she renders eternal her own vision of a plural, multiple India by painting it over the corruption and deformity of the present, amount to no more than a "romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation." (www.nybooks.com) Rushdie's critical stance towards the metaphor of the nation as family can be surmised in his portrayal of feminine figures symbolic of mother India: Belle, Aurora, and finally Uma Sarasvati. Whereas Belle embodies the spirit of endless division, Aurora, in spite of her depiction as the brilliant voice of the nation's hybridity, has her failings. As Coetzee pointed out, she is too much of an artist to be a good mother: her preference for representation leads to an objectification, a reification of her relationship with the Moor and his three sisters. This happens because representation is a relationship which establishes a hegemonic one-way relationship between the representer and the represented; love on the other hand implies a two-way communication. Eventually, she (as well as her husband) is responsible for the destruction of their children. Through her identification with the image of Mother India, Rushdie problematizes the notion of a postcolonial identity mainly dependent on national definitions (however inclusive). In a way, the novel is Rushdie's last sigh, his last looking back towards the concepts of nation and national identity before dropping them in favor of his own version of cosmopolitanism. Moraes writes "Motherness- excuse me if I underline the point- is a big idea in India, maybe our biggest: the land as mother, the mother as land, as the firm ground beneath our feet." (137) It is no coincidence that Rushdie's following novel *The Ground beneath Her Feet* will deal with the shakiness rather than the stability of the ground: the idea of motherhood, of the nation as family is finally dismissed in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and in his next piece of work Rushdie is more concerned with growing up as a coming to independence than with questioning the allegiances to family and nation.

6 Mother India is also the name of a popular Hindi movie directed by Mehboob Khan and produced in 1957. The figure of Radha, a strong peasant woman and mother, stands for India.

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An attendant problem on the issues of conflict and division that suffuse the Moor's narrative is how to explain them. My contention is that these issues are related to a specific understanding of nationalism and a particular distribution of gender roles during colonial rule, both of whom were challenged by the increasing individualization of postcolonial societies. In *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Partha Chaterjee delineates a model of Indian nationalism that was developed in opposition to Westernized concepts of imagining the nation. According to Chaterjee, the early anticolonialist nationalists produced their own domain of sovereignty by dividing culture into material and spiritual areas and staked their independence on the claim to the spiritual sphere, represented by religion, caste, women and the family. In order to preserve their sense of an authentic identity, communities engaged in an artificial separation of the material and spiritual spheres:

> The material is the domain of the "outside," of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. […] The spiritual, on the other hand, is an "inner" domain bearing the essential" marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture. (6)

Because the domain of the spiritual was imagined as a repository of essentialized authentic identities enabling political contest, the aspirations of the marginal groups (among them women) included in the spiritual dimension were subject to 'normalization' and naturalization. Women were ascribed gender roles that helped defined an "atavistic and authentic" body of tradition, while men represented the "progressive, or revolutionary, principle" (McClintock 2) Thus postcolonialism inherited a double (and divided) idea of identity: the concept of an internal identity, essential and mythic and an 'outside' concept of political and economic identities. While women were forced to hide their difference and complexity under an essentialized concept of motherhood, men evaluated their social, economic and political positions according to the borrowed standards of Western ideology. Radhakrishnan, commenting on Chaterjee's model, notes that

> nationalist rhetoric makes 'woman' the pure and ahistorical signifier of 'interiority'. In the fight against the enemy outside, something within gets even more repressed and 'woman' becomes the mute but necessary allegorical ground for the transactions of nationalist history. […]
> The result is a fundamental rupture […] a radical collapse of representation. Unable to produce its own history in response to its inner sense of identity, nationalist ideology sets up Woman as victim and goddess simultaneously. Woman becomes the allegorical name for a specific historical failure: the failure to coordinate the political or the ontological with the epistemological within an undivided agency (84-5)

Rushdie's feminine characters have to suffer the consequences of this double idea of identity. Aurora's mother Belle challenges the patriarchal gender system by reversing the stereotypical roles assigned to women and men: she takes care of the family business and adopts tough 'male' strategies in order to do that. The recognition of her being a tower of

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strength comes with her moniker 'Queen Isabella of Cochin'. Other strong women like Aurora and Uma choose to follow the path of their artistic development, ignoring the binding essentialisms that are the heritage of the anticolonial struggle for independence. Yet in so doing, they destroy themselves and the men they love. The division of the family/nation into clearly separated gender roles and the failure of nationalism to provide opportunities for change are analyzed as the major ills affecting postcolonial nations like India.

3. "Peeling off history" in order to become an individual

The fate of the Moor illustrates the effects of this conflict/division on the construction of subjectivity. He is born under his great-grandmother Epiphania's curse: "a house divided against itself cannot stand […] may your house be forever partitioned, may its foundations turn to dust, may your children rise up against you, and may your fall be hard ;" (99) Since the family (and nation, by extension) is conceived as a site of ongoing struggle, Moraes gets caught in the middle: between his willful, brilliant mother, who in her art attempts to build the myth of a plural, hybrid nation able to accommodate her own difference and a father corrupted by the Western capitalist drive for profit. As he tries to forge an identity, he will successively identify with his mother, Uma, his father and then Raman (Mainduck) Fielding. All these identifications are tainted by history and fail in the end. His mother's love proves insufficient: whereas at the beginning he is part of her political project of offering a counter-image to nationalist India, Moraes sees his mother's possessiveness as an attempt to stifle his personality. In unconscious protest against her terrible love, he strives for freedom and love. In this state of mind, he encounters Uma Sarasvati, a rival artist of his mother's. Uma embodies another type of pluralism: while Aurora stands for an integrative pluralism, Uma represents "the protean, hybridized, postmodern and postcolonial subject" who turns out to be "faithless and destructive" (Baker 242) Uma is as fraudulent as his father, an artist who creates various personas in order to catch the Moor in her trap: her hidden purpose is destruction- revenge against Aurora, whose place as the essential Indian artist she intends to take. After sending Aurora the tapes with the Moor's insulting remarks directed at his mother, Uma accidentally swallows the poison she had prepared for the Moor. She crushes his heart, but also makes him acknowledge his mistaken love for "the pluralist Uma, with her multiple selves, her highly inventive commitment to the infinite malleability of the real, her modernistically provisional sense of truth, who had turned out to be the bad egg" (272) Uma's identity consists in a collection of roles with which she identifies- a set of "radically different personae" (265) without an integrative core that can hold them together while at the same time allowing for change and transformation.

As a result of Uma's jealous intervention, the Moor is disinherited and kicked out of his parents' home. The moment is described as one of disorientation (a foreshadowing of *The Ground beneath Her Feet*):

> I stumbled through them, giddy, disoriented, lost. I was nobody, nothing. Nothing I had ever known was of use, nor could I any longer say that I knew it. I had been emptied, invalidated; I was, to use a hoary but suddenly fitting epithet, *ruined*. I had fallen from grace, and the horror of it shattered the universe, like a mirror. I felt as though I, too, had shattered; as if I were falling to earth, not as myself, but as a thousand and one fragmented images of myself, trapped in shards of glass. (278-279)

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In a similar fashion to *The Ground beneath Her Feet*, the moment of disorientation is understood as the beginning of maturity (the fall from grace also echoes the fall from the bombed plane in *The Satanic Verses*). In spite of his broken heart and the shattered vision of his childhood world, the Moor articulates the necessity of finding his own true self, independent of his parents, several times throughout the narrative: "in writing this, I must peel off history, the prison of the past. It is time for […] the truth about myself to struggle out, at last, from under my parents' stifling power"(136) and "I need no longer be what ancestry, breeding and misfortune had decreed, but could enter, at long last, into my self- my true self." (295) Even if the project Moraes outlines here, that of being true to himself, will eventually fail, his being able to articulate this desire for authenticity counts as a step forward in the conceptualization of postcolonial subjectivity. Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* is incapable of articulating such an ideal- he remains forever committed to a sense of history and self being inseparable and inevitably interlocked. Charles Taylor analyzes the desire for authenticity as one of the major moral ideas that have shaped and continue to shape modernity. He argues that behind the self-fulfillment, moral relativism and subjectivism characteristic of our age we can distinguish the moral force of the ideal of authenticity. (15-6) Here is Taylor's definition of authenticity, closely linked to the goal of self-fulfillment:

> Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potentiality that is properly my own. This is the background understanding to the modern ideal of authenticity, and to the goals of self-fulfillment and self-realization in which it is usually couched. This is the background that gives moral force to the culture of authenticity, including its most degraded, absurd, or trivialized forms. It is what gives sense to the idea of 'doing your own thing' or 'finding your own fulfillment'. (29)

What Taylor calls the culture of authenticity is not only a modern, but also a specifically Western culture, with roots in the Christian theology of St Augustine, the writings of Rousseau and the philosophy of Herder. Rushdie's criticism and final abandonment of pluralism (Aurora) and multiculturalism (Uma) as wrong matrices for the development of subjectivity coincides with the adoption of a cosmopolitan model, in which the individual is conceived as less dependent on his membership in cultural communities and where "voluntary affiliations" (Hollinger 3) are favoured.

After his release from jail (where he was thrown following accusations of having poisoned Uma) the Moor, lacking the protection of his family, is forced to join the criminal underworld of Bombay as the right-hand man of Raman Fielding, "a thinly disguised caricature of Bal Thakeray[7] ". (Coetzee www.nybooks.com) Raman Fielding, a Hindu demagogue with an army of thugs stands for what Latour called the work of purification. He is an apostle of cultural purity, who believes that the "true nation is what we must reclaim

7 Balasaheb Thakeray, ex- leader of the Shiv Sena Party (SSP), whose SS initials are a fateful (and not altogether wrong) reminder of fascism. Rushdie calls them "the most overtly Hindu-fundamentalist grouping ever to achieve office anywhere in India" (*The Riddle of Midnight* 322). The SSP (whose symbol is the Bengali tiger) is an extreme right wing group, with overt anti-Muslim views.

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from beneath the layers of alien empires." (299). A specter of Hindu fundamentalism on the rise, Fielding's ideology is reactionary and repressive:

> He was against unions, in favour of breaking strikes, against working women, in favour of sati, against poverty and in favour of wealth. He was against 'immigrants' to the city […] against the corruption of the Congress and for 'direct action', by which he meant paramilitary activity in support of his political aims, and the institution of a bribery-system of his own. He derided the Marxist analysis of society as class struggle and lauded the Hindu preference for the stability of caste. In the national flag he was in favour of the colour saffron and against the colour green[8]. (298-9)

Moraes acts as the right-hand man of Raman Fielding: he is a physical colossus, six feet and a half tall[9] and he possesses a misshapen club-like right hand, with whom he knocks down his adversaries. The associations that the misshapen right hand of the Moor calls to mind are used to throw into doubt Raman Fielding's political power. The symbolic meanings of the hand are traditionally linked to power and authority. Additionally, the right hand is associated with the solar, the rational and the conscious- with the yang energy in Asian cultures. Moraes' deformed right hand serves as an indication of the illegitimacy of Fielding's power- based on intimidation and aggression and sustained by a vast underground criminal network, similar to his father's. The deformity of his hand points to an alteration of the rational, to Fielding's rhetorical stratagems and his reliance on the irrational powers of religious fundamentalism to gain adherents. He acknowledges people's thirst for the irrational and decides to enlist it as his "power's secret source": "it is not the civil social norm for which men yearn, but the outrageous, the outside, the out-of-bounds." (305) Since Abraham and Fielding are competing for primacy in Bombay, the Moor stands divided in his loyalties: he is at first enlisted in Fielding's underground army, and then switches his allegiance to his father. Neither master appeals to him- as Moraes notes, echoing Vasco Miranda "corruption was the only force we had that could defeat fanaticism." (332)

The struggle for primacy between Abraham and Fielding ends in the murder of the latter and an explosion that destroys half of Bombay, driving Moraes to Spain. The flight to Spain is a symbolic return to origins (in search of his true hidden self), as the Moor returns to the very spot where his ancestor, the sultan Boabdil had abandoned his power. His exile from India is construed as the only adequate response to the increasing violence and religious fundamentalism of his native country. Yet the alternatives to the constraints of a rigid definition of nation- pluralism and multiculturalism- have been deeply problematized throughout the novel.

Paul Cantor argues that Moraes' encounter with a multicultural Spain turns up to be equally criticized by Rushdie, who "comes to raise doubts about the value of cultural hybridity itself ". (Cantor 133) The cultural pluralism that the Moor observes in Spain is devoid of authenticity: in the village of Benengeli the Moor suddenly finds himself

8 The colour saffron represents the Hindu majority, while green stands for the Muslim minority, as the favourite colour of Prophet Muhammad, who wore a green cloak and turban.
9 6.5 feet is 1.98 meters, 2 meters approximately.

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> in a most un-Spanish thoroughfare, a 'pedestrianised' street full of non-Spaniards […] flanked by a number of expensive boutiques- Gucci, Hermes, Aquascutum, Cardin, Paloma Picasso- and also by eating places ranging from Scandinavian meat vendors to a Stars-and-Stripes-liveried Chicago Rib. (390)

Cantor notes that for Rushdie "the commodity culture of capitalism abstracts from the local, from anything that roots a people in their soil, and substitutes instead a world of falsely universal brand names, epitomized by the fast-food chains that spring up everywhere and belong nowhere" (134).

A somewhat strange figure depicted in the manner of Bulgakov's Woland (the devil from *The Master and Margarita*) whispers in his ear " It may be hard for you to pity these lost souls in alligator shoes and sport-shirts with crocodiles over their nipples, but compassion is what is required here […] these blood-suckers are already in Hell." (390)

It is clear that this is capitalist Hell, and multiculturalism appears as just another of its faces. Thus the Moor is again caught between two versions of evil: while in India he would have been forced to adopt a narrow definition of identity, the tolerant capitalist ideology in Spain would oblige him to relinquish any sense of self and identity. Cantor concludes that in spite of "his celebration of cultural hybridity, Rushdie has always worried that it can degenerate into empty forms of amalgamation, in which the elements coalesce only because they have been stripped of all serious content" (135)

Vasco Miranda, Aurora's lover now turned her rival, epitomizes the spuriousness of capitalist multicultural hotchpotch: a talented Goan painter and Aurora's former lover, he has sold out to the capitalist drive for accumulation and has amassed a fortune by selling kitsch to Westerners. Driven insane by jealousy, he imprisons the Moor in his fortress, letting him live as long as he goes on with his story. The story thus becomes equivalent with his life, and the construction of subjectivity is finally entrusted to the words that build up narrative meaning. The search for identity is a search for love (understood as the unifying, harmonizing principle that binds together the many facets of human subjectivity): when Vasco Miranda dies upon the portrait of Aurora, the Moor meditates on his mother's death: "She, too, had gone beyond recall, and she never spoke to me, never made confession, never gave me back what I needed, the certainty of her love." (432) Confession is here understood as a gesture of reconciliation- a reconciliation prevented by Aurora's untimely death (her murderer was none other than her husband Abraham). This association between love, confession and identity shifts the weight of identity-construction from supra-personal machines to the individual. When subjectivity is understood as a result/effect of identifications with nation/state/culture/religion its construction is plagued by contradictions; it is only at the individual level of making meaning that personal identity can take shape.

4. Conclusion

What Rushdie dramatizes in different ways in his fiction is the thoroughly modern necessity of dropping traditional understandings of the individual as essentially constituted by his belonging to a group or community and focusing instead on the responsibilities and difficulties of what Ulrich Beck called 'individualization': "the compulsion to create, to stage-manage, not only one's own biography but the bonds and networks surrounding it, and to do

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this amid changing preferences and at successive stages of life" (27) The individual thus becomes the nodal point of social structure as a result of the rapidly changing social, political and economic environments.

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