V.S. NAIPAUL'S TRAVELOGUES: HINDU VERSUS MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to compare representations of Hindu and Muslim communities in two of V.S.Naipaul's travelogues: An Area of Darkness and Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey, relating them to Naipaul's own background and quest for identity. Thus, while both Hindus and Muslims are represented as others to Naipaul's sense of self, the processes of othering through which their identities are constructed are radically different. Hindus are represented as significant/relevant others - people who are important for the construction of one's sense of self. As the background of Naipaul's childhood, India is "a resting place for the imagination" (the darkness from the title is associated with the unconscious and the imagination, not with evil) and although the identification with the Hindus is finally rejected, there is still a sense of Hindu culture as providing an important environment for the writer's development. Muslims, on the other hand, are perceived as radical others with whom identification is not only outwardly rejected, but quite impossible. Both relevant and radical others are crucial for identity- construction, as the first provide a positive content for identification, and the second outline the limits of one's sense of selfhood, the barriers outside which subjectivity loses meaning.

Keywords: travelogue, self-identifications, postcolonial societies, Hindu and Muslim communities.

1.Traveling fiction as a modern genre

As a modern genre traveling fiction points further back in time than the novel: late Renaissance to early Enlightenment. It is closely linked to the theme of exploration and colonizing. Walter Raleigh's account of his travels to South America in search of El Dorado documents in detail the attempts of the British Crown to seize any valuable lands, including colonies that already belonged to the Spanish. Early travel accounts were written either as a document and testimonial of exploration and discovery or, as it happened during the age of reason and enlightenment, as concealed critiques of the societies at home under absolutist rule. Thus, although as a genre aiming to faithfully record events, impressions and facts travel fiction advances stronger claims to truth than the novel, in reality it served the goals of diverse ideologies, including colonialism and imperialism. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said discusses numerous travel books that were written and published in colonial centers as ideological supports of colonial policies (*Voyage en Orient* by Nerval, *Voyage en Egypt et en Syrie* by Volney, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: a Triumph*, by T.E.Lawrence, etc.).

V.S. Naipaul's traveling fiction is a case apart. At first, one might be tempted to interpret Naipaul's use of the genre as a gesture of mimicry and appropriation: the colonized mirroring the colonizer's strategy and turning it against him. But Naipaul is a complex writer who often eludes the interpretive paradigms of postcolonial studies. My thesis is that Naipaul's traveling fiction is a momentous step in his quest for identity, it is the equivalent of an erasing gesture, over which the deracinated writer inscribes his carefully constructed writer identity.

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2. The aim of the paper

Born in Chaguanas, Trinidad, on 17th August 1932, V.S.Naipaul is the product of a complex background: his ancestors came to Trinidad from the region of Utar Pradesh, India, as indentured labourers. As a member of the East Indian community in Trinidad, Naipaul grew up in an ethnically and culturally diverse society among Indians, Muslims, Africans, Spanish, English and French. Later, he went to London for his studies, but, although firmly decided to escape the confining and backward society at home, he rejected England [1]as his adoptive home. He became "a man without roots", with no specific cultural identity to call his own. At this point he took up traveling and writing accounts of his visits to India, Pakistan, Iran, South America and Africa. The countries he described in his travelogues are in their great majority ex-colonies and Naipaul combined description with a sharp analysis of the effects of colonialism on these now independent states. Among his most important works are: *An Area of Darkness* and *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*, in which he attempts to portrait Hindu and Muslim societies.

The aim of this paper is to compare representations of Hindus and Muslims in the two works, relating them to Naipaul's own background and quest for identity. Thus, while both Hindus and Muslims are represented as others to Naipaul's sense of self, the processes of othering through which their identities are constructed are radically different. Hindus are represented as significant/relevant[2] others (Harry Stack Sullivan)- people who are important for the construction of one's sense of self. As the background of Naipaul's childhood, India is "a resting place for the imagination" (the darkness from the title is associated with the unconscious and the imagination, not with evil) and although the identification with the Hindus is finally rejected, there is still a sense of Hindu culture as providing an important environment for the writer's development. Muslims, on the other hand, are perceived as radical others with whom identification is not only outwardly rejected, but quite impossible. Both relevant and radical others are crucial for identity- construction, as the first provide a positive content for identification, and the second outline the limits of one's sense of selfhood, the barriers outside which subjectivity loses meaning.

3.Hindu societies versus Muslim societies

Both the journey to India (1962) and the one to Iran (the first in *Among the Believers*) in 1979 open with a disappointing incident for the traveling Naipaul: at the Indian customs his liquor bottles are confiscated (to be returned when a liquor permit is obtained); in Iran Sadeq, his first choice as an interpreter and guide, refuses to drive the writer to Qom under the pretext that his car has broken down. Naipaul's reaction to these disappointments is different: whereas in Bombay the incident of the confiscated (and never returned) liquor bottles serves as a prelude for a lengthy description of the endless and inefficient Indian bureaucracy (though the individuals themselves are sympathetic and kind, the whole system is a mess), here are Naipaul's comments when Sadeq decides to call off their engagement: "I didn't like him. I saw him as a man of simple origins, simply educated, but with a great sneering pride, deferential but resentful, not liking himself for what he was doing. He was the

[1] In referring to Great Britain, Naipaul always uses England. This is not because of his insensitivity to issues of inclusion/ exclusion- it occurs as a result of Naipaul's early identification with an imaginary England as the land of civility where he wanted to pursue his dream of becoming a writer.

[2] Although the term "significant other" was coined by Sullivan in *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* to refer to important people that influence the development of personality in adolescence, its meaning can be extended to larger groups (ethnic, religious or other communities) that exert an influence over an individual's self-identity.

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kind of man who, without political doctrine, only with resentments, had made the Iranian revolution."(*Among the Believers* 3)

Another key difference is the stereotyping of Bombay and Tehran, seen as representatives of the two cultures of Hindus and Muslims. Bombay is typically perceived as the exotic east, luxurious and exhausting because of its climate, a place that "sapped energy and will" (*An Area* 11). In describing Tehran, a hint of violence and threat makes itself felt and living in Tehran may be compared to a dangerous jungle adventure: in this city "plastered with revolutionary posters and cartoons with an emphasis on blood"(*Among the Believers* 6-7) it was impossible to survive without a native guide.

A large portion of either book is dedicated to Naipaul's minute analyses of the social and historical ills affecting Hindu and Muslim societies. The system of caste, which imprisons men in their conditions at birth is the main impediment in the development of Indian society. Degree, or the knowledge (which implies respect and compliance with one's place in society) of one's ascribed social identity is mainly responsible for the lack of ambition in Hindus, who prefer to stick to their social situation instead of improving it. Religion endorses caste: "Caste, sanctioned by the Gita with almost propagandistic fervor […] has decayed and ossified with the society, and its corollary, function, has become all: the sweeper's inefficiency and the merchant's short sighted ruthlessness are inevitable."(*An Area* 91) Poverty and lack of proper hygienic education are also criticized as social ills. Instead of abhorring, Indians love poverty: " It is Indian above all in its attitude to poverty as something which […] releases the sweetest of emotions. This is poverty, our special poverty, and how sad it is! Poverty as an urge not to anger or improving action, but poverty as an inexhaustible source of tears, an exercise of the purest sensibility."(46) Here Naipaul is so preoccupied with reinforcing his own sense of self (active, militant, civilizing) that in condemning the Indian attitude to poverty as encouraging and perpetuating social injustices, he forgets how important this sense of poverty has been and still is for the Indian history and Indian identity: after all, Gandhi himself, whose opinions Naipaul often echoes approvingly in *An Area of Darkness*, started his nationalist and anti-colonialist campaign by taking a vow of poverty; furthermore, the idea of poverty and the history of the low castes has spawned one of the most influential schools of postcolonial criticism in India: The Subaltern Studies. Following Gandhi, who made a habit of building septic tanks in the villages he visited even before talking to the people about independence, Naipaul criticizes the Indian attitude to personal hygiene. His description of the Indian custom of defecating everywhere is still one of the most shocking in traveling literature:

Indians defecate everywhere. They defecate mostly beside the railway tracks. But they also defecate on the beaches; they defecate on the hills; they defecate on the river banks; they defecate on the streets […] These squatting figures- to the visitor, after a time, as eternal and emblematic as Rodin's thinker-are never spoken of; they are never written about; they are not mentioned in novels or stories; they do not appear in feature films or documentaries.(81)

The shocking effect is ironically coupled with the echoes of Sir Winston Churchill's famous speech to the Parliament : "we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and on the streets; we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender"(Bowell and Kemp 6).The beaches, the streets, the hills- the places which for Churchill's rhetoric serve as a symbolic and powerful incentive to fight and resist the Nazi conquest become markers of shame for Naipaul's mock-rhetoric. The emphatic repetitions are employed to the same task: by contrast with the building energy of the repetitive phrases, the incidents alluded to (the custom of defecating everywhere) appear even more trivial and despicable.

Naipaul is also critical of the Indian capacity of mimicry. According to Ashcroft, mimicry describes:

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the ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized. When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that can be quite threatening. This is because mimicry is never far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics. Mimicry therefore locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty of its control of the behavior of the colonized. (139)

Indians rely heavily on mimicry: the administrative systems, the railways and the buildings all copy the English system. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as Ashcroft and other postcolonial theorists seem to imply- for Indian backward society mimicry of the Western is necessary if they want to maintain a functional state administration. Yet this mimicry sometimes degenerates into schizophrenia, Naipaul's term for double standards/ double consciousness:" Schizophrenia might better explain the scientist, who, before taking up his appointment, consults an astrologer for an auspicious day." (63)

The fantastic side of mimicry is revealed when this becomes dominant and all-pervasive, taken out of historical context. While the English have moved on and completely altered their institutions and institutional behavior, the Indian army officer is still a perfect duplicate of its former English counterpart, exclaiming "By Jove! I feel rather bushed" (64) and subscribing to an obsolete way of life which is now only present in the fictions of newspapers: "Leaving 'civil lines', 'cantonments', leaving people 'going off to the hills'; magic words now fully possessed, now spoken of as right, in what is now at last Indian Anglo- India, where smartness can be found in the cosy proletarian trivialities of Woman's Own and the Daily Mirror, and where Mrs.Hawksbee, a Millamant of the suburbs, is still the arbiter of elegance."(*An Area* 64)

Since postcolonial studies was established as an academic discipline with a political agenda of liberation from colonialism and imperialism, it is no wonder that theorists such as Bhabha and Ashcroft emphasize the subversive side of mimicry and its fundamental role in the parodying of colonial hegemonic discourse. Naipaul, who wrote long before such theory, concentrates on the absurdities of postcolonial society that this mimicry reveals. According to Naipaul, far from being a strategy of liberation, mimicry shows the extent to which the postcolonial subject is still mired in its enslavement to the former colonists. Indian mimicry shows that for Indian subjects the departure of the English constituted the moment when the Indians were left to administer the much admired and much desired foreign colonial culture on their own. Independence is thus associated not with the desire for an Indian own culture, but with satisfying the longing for the colonizer's culture. This process can be best understood if we take into account Rene Girard's definition of mimetic desire.(*Desire and the Novel* 1-2) In his view, desire for an object (in this case the colonizer's culture) is always mediated by another person (the colonizer) who is envied for the possession of the object. Desire does not exist prior to the rivalry between colonizers and colonized. After the colonizer's departure, the desired object could be possessed completely, although the mode of possession seems to be fantastic and absurd. It appears so because culture cannot be possessed like an object; culture changes and evolves in historical context. By practicing the colonizer's culture as it had been in the days when India was still a colony, Indians fall prey to the unreal and absurd: "In the Indian setting, this Indian English mimicry is like fantasy. It is an undiminishing absurdity; and it is only slowly that one formulates what was sensed from the first day: this is a mimicry not of England, but of the fairy tale land of Anglo-India, of clubs and sahibs and syces and bearers."(*An Area* 63)

The shortcomings of Muslim societies ("societies of believers", as Naipaul dubs them) are explained by recourse to their complex religious and political history. Without stating it bluntly, what Naipaul implies when analyzing Muslim faith is that Islam is little

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more than a political and military doctrine disguised as religion and that its utopian aim is creating "a society of believers" (people whose attributes are blind faith in a sole leader and lack of individuality). Furthermore, Islam is an imperialism as well as a religion:

Islam in Iran was even more complicated. It was a divergence from the main belief; and this divergence had its roots in the political-racial dispute about the succession to the Prophet, who died in 632 A.D. Islam, almost from the start, had been an imperialism as well as a religion, with an early history remarkably like a speeded-up version of the history of Rome, developing from city-state to peninsular overlord to empire, with corresponding stresses at every stage.(*Among the Believers* 7)

The awareness of Islamic imperialism comes from Naipaul's background as an East Indian, a background marked by Hindu-Muslim conflict. Born and raised far from India and the blood baths of communal violence, Naipaul still inherits an awareness of Muslims as figures of threatening others from his family and community:

I grew up with the knowledge that Muslims, though ancestrally of India and therefore like ourselves in many ways, were different.[…] The difference between the Hindus and Muslims was more a matter of group feeling, and mysterious; the animosities our Hindu and Muslim grandfathers had brought from India had softened into a kind of folk wisdom about the unreliability and treachery of the other side.(11)

In talking about Hindu- Muslim animosities, Naipaul adopts the position and the eye of the impartial observer: he discusses these two cultures from the standpoint of rationality and the ideal of objectivity. As other figures, both Hindu and Muslim culture fall short of standards of rationality and indulge into socially unproductive displays of emotion and nostalgia. The equivalent of the Hindu emotional attitude to poverty is the Muslim attitude to sadness. In Tehran Naipaul notices postcards on sale where "the women were weeping, and the children were weeping. Big, gelatinous tears, lovingly rendered, ran half-way down the cheeks." His Iranian guide's remark is significant: "Persian poetry is full of sadness"(9), and following Naipaul's protest about the inefficiency of tears, he emphasizes: "Those tears are *beautiful.*" Suffering is posed as an aesthetic ideal, but only for the oppressed: the poor in India, women and children in Iran. However, it is not this emphasis on the emotional at the expense of the rational and efficient, an emphasis which both Hindu and Muslim cultures share that Naipaul condemns as a radical evil. The radical evil in Muslim cultures is the absence of the middle way, of negotiation and compromise- political and religious fundamentalism: "You were religious or communist: there was no middle, or other, way in Iran"(72) Naipaul's guide in Tehran, a young man called Behzad, is a communist, an opponent of the religious rule of the mullahs, yet his idea of communist revolution is described as just another brand of fundamentalism: "his idea of justice for the pure and the suffering was inseparable from the idea of punishment for the wicked"(59) Here again Naipaul's strong reaction of rejection stands in the way of a finer understanding of historical context: communism in Iran was a reaction to the former Shah's policy of "Americanizing the country" (as the shah's attempts at westernization were perceived by the people) and due to Iran's geographical closeness to the United States' greatest adversary, communist ideology tended to be less Marxist and more Stalinist in its aggressive undertones. It was because of the influence of the Soviet Union that communism acquired such an extreme revolutionary fervor in Iran- and not because of the Muslims' innate fundamentalism. Naipaul himself comes face to face with this aversion of the ordinary people towards westernization and Americanization, when he ironically notices that after the revolution, Kentucky Fried Chicken became Our Fried Chicken. Sometimes this complete rejection of western ways (which brought the mullahs to power) takes extreme and rather ridiculous form: in an example of Islam urban planning, one important specification is that "the toilet fixtures shall be arranged so as to make the user not to face the City of Mecca either from his front or back side."(31-32)

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The central flaw of Muslim states like Iran and Pakistan is the way they mix politics with religion, Islamic unity being posed as the necessary condition for the coagulation of the state. Mass prayers were to be held at Tehran University as a sign of revolutionary unity:" It was Taleqani who had decreed these mass prayers at Tehran University as a demonstration of revolutionary unity, unity as in the days of the Prophet and the desert tribes."(64) However, it is Pakistan that best exemplifies such a terrible mistake. The book dedicated to Naipaul's visit in Pakistan is significantly entitled *Pakistan: The Salt Hills of A Dream*. Although reminiscent of the American Dream, the Muslim dream of a separate state was highly dangerous, as it had been established on a concept close to religious nationalism, in contrast to American civic nationalism (where the bonds between citizens are exclusively political, not ethnic or religious). In a speech delivered in front of the All-Indian Muslim League, the poet Mohammed Iqbal advanced the idea of a separate Muslim state on the grounds that "Religion for a Muslim is not a matter of private conscience or private practice, as Christianity can be for the man in Europe."(89) The very basis on which European states were established, the separation of the public and the private, the religious and the secular and the clear demarcation between the three powers: the executive, the legal and the judicial is criticized by Iqbal in his speech and deemed inappropriate for Muslims, who "need a Muslim polity, a Muslim State."(89) In Europe the separation between the Church and State had been instituted after decades of religious wars, and it was the only solution capable of reducing animosities between the various Christian denominations- yet Iqbal chooses to overlook this historical fact, emphasizing that the Muslim faith is stronger than the Christian, and more unitary. As it proved later, whoever forgets the past only commits the same mistakes twice, because "that Muslim state came with a communal holocaust on both sides of the new borders. Millions were killed and many millions more uprooted."(89) However, the recognition of the mistake committed at the very moment of state- foundation proves unable to put things back on the right track, as this recognition is taken out of its historical context and related only to religious faith:

The state withered. But faith didn't. Failure only led back to the faith. The state had been founded as a homeland for Muslims. If the state failed, it wasn't because the dream was flawed, or the faith flawed; it could only be because men had failed the faith. A purer and purer faith began to be called for. And in that quest for the Islamic absolute- the society of believers, where every action was instinct with worship- men lost sight of the political origins of their state.(90)

Religious fundamentalism, according to Naipaul, is the consequence of ignoring historical context; in Pakistan it was the dream that was flawed, not the people's faith.

4.Internal differences in Muslim societies

The system of binary oppositions Hindu-Muslim, Hindu-Western, Muslim-Western is further enriched by the opposition Indian Muslims-Iranian and Pakistani Muslims. In *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul narrates his encounter with Kashmiri Islam. Led by Aziz, a moderate Muslim, he went to Hasanbad, where a Muslim Shia procession was to be held. Naipaul describes the Shia religious procession as an extremely bloody one, where violence, self-mutilation and pride intermingle to create again the impression of undue cruelty and barbarity:

More flagellants appeared. The back of one was obscenely cut up; blood, still fresh, soaked his trousers. He walked briskly up and down, deliberately bumping into people and walking as though offended. His whip hung from his waist. It was made up of perhaps six metal chains, eighteen inches long, each ending in a small bloody blade […] As disquieting as the blood were the faces of some enthusiasts. One had no nose, just two punctures in a

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triangle of pink mottled flesh; one had grotesquely raw bulging eyes; there was one with no neck, the flesh distended straight from cheek to chest.(154-55)

Aziz, a typical Kashmiri Muslim, looks down on the bloody spectacle of the Shia, explaining that the Shias are not real Muslims and showing to the traveling writer how Shias bowed one way when saying their prayers and how Muslims bowed the other way.(156). The opposition Shia-Muslim would have made no sense in an Islamic despotism like Iran or Pakistan, where to be Muslim was to be Shia. These different understandings inside Islam testify to the fact that the apparent unity of this religion as proclaimed by the mullahs in Iran and Pakistan is no more than an ideological construction, whose purpose is to set the stage for social and political unity. Religious unity is posed as the basis for political submission and social conformity.

As a witness to the Shia religious festival, Naipaul remarks upon the similarity between the Shia religion and spectacle: "Religious enthusiasm derived, in performance and admiration, from simplicity, from a knowledge of religion only as ritual and form."(156) A few decades of anthropology have taught us that ritual and symbolic practices often yield complex meanings, yet Naipaul calls this type of knowledge simplicity. It is also highly unusual for a cosmopolitan writer born in a multiracial society, a writer of Naipaul's sensitivity and social acumen to look down on the meanings of ritual. In his youth, he had been constrained by his family to become a pundit, and his daily performance of the Hindu ritual of puja left an imprint on his sense of cleanliness and purity which resurfaces in almost every novel. It seems that this negative appraisal of ritual is reserved only for Shia rituals, and the reason for this is that they are perceived as bloody and violent.

Yet one cannot help noticing that whereas Naipaul tends to distance himself both from the Hindu and Muslim societies, his rejection of Muslim cultures as violent and inclined to fundamentalism is obliquely connected both to his Hindu ethnic identity and to his (again obliquely acknowledged) identification with Western cultural and political values. Although his prose testifies to the infinite difference of Muslim societies, he is never willing to accept that fundamentalism might be more a historical response to Western colonization than an innate possibility of Islam religions. For this reason many aspects of Islamic cultures are ignored, as for example the co-existence of Hinduism and Islam under the reign of Akbar the Great in India or the Christian-Muslim syncretism in cities such as Baghdad, where Virgin Mary is venerated next to Imam Ali.

5.Relevant/significant Others versus Radical Others

Thus, whereas Hinduism is criticized for its negative influence on Indian society, but valued as a system of thought, Islam embodies the radical other of Western liberal, rational ideal. Instead of a clear separation of the sacred and the secular, Islam is a political religion; its adepts are denied rationality as they are instructed to believe and to obey; because of their blind faith and strong sense of community, they lack the very foundations of individuality and therefore can never establish a democratic society. At the same time, the imperialism of Islam is dangerously similar to that of wealthy Western nations: the reasons behind expansion are the same economic and political interests, even if the effects differ somewhat. For Naipaul, a sharp critic of Western imperialism, there is always the underlying assumption of Western superiority: thus, even if in the countries affected by colonialism the state and its institutions have been indelibly marred, this doesn't alter Naipaul's conviction that civilization, rationality and democracy (all western inventions) are still preferable to barbarity, blind faith and despotism. We tread a very fine line with Naipaul here, and his identifications are not always easily made. In spite of his often scathing criticism of Western colonial empires, his values are the classical liberal ones: culture and civility, rationality, democracy. This has engendered confusion: typically, Naipaul has been misunderstood in two

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ways: he was either criticized for consorting with the enemy or for being too arrogant in rejecting the West while embracing its values. But if he had been a European and written the same pieces, he would have probably been hailed as a revolutionary writer with sensitivity to issues of social justice- which is exactly what he is. Everybody expected him to stand for the values of his own culture- according to Western multicultural politics. But when he wrote, there was no such thing- he was among the first to pave the way for a common Caribbean culture, forged by subsequent generations. To make reference to one meaning of the word "culture", he was the one whose task was to plough and weed a waste land before others turned it into a fertile spot.

However, it would be a mistake to suppose that Naipaul's identification with the values of Western civilization is complete or exclusive; he takes his obsession with purity from Hinduism (the fear of pollution), and he develops an interest in history and archives in parallel with his efforts of unearthing the Caribbean past. He never identifies with social or racial groups: that's why he insists he is deracinated. Identity theory mainly works with social and cultural identities, and as Naipaul outwardly rejects any sense of identification with a cultural or racial group, the problems of placing him have challenged and intrigued many scholars.

Naipaul's traveling fiction reveals a profound interest in colonial and postcolonial cultures. This interest is usually triggered by the necessity to identify with cultural or social groups. Hindus and Muslims were an important part of his native community in Trinidad, and relations with these groups were established early. Hindus act as relevant others and Muslims are identified as the radical others of Western civilization. While denying any identification with Muslims, Naipaul places himself at an equal distance from both Western and Hindu civilizations, whose values he is at pains to emphasize when criticizing Muslim "societies of believers". Hindu pluralism and toleration of diversity, Western separation between the sacred and secular are actively supported by Naipaul as beneficial policies. It is obvious that identifications with social or cultural groups are not crucial for his sense of selfhood. What is/are then his salient identity/identities? I suspect that the writer identity plays this central part. It is the main identity consciously taken on by Naipaul, which serves as an organizer for his relations with cultural and social groups. Fawzia Mustafa notes that Naipaul's career follows the pattern of the 19th century *bildungsroman* and is centered upon his "childhood desire for 'a romantic career…as a writer' "(8) Naipaul himself admits that the desire to become a writer is what prompted him to go to London: "You will understand, then, how important it was to me to know when I was young that I could make this journey from the margin to the center, from Trinidad to London. The ambition to be a writer assumed that this was possible. So, in fact, I was taking it for granted, in spite of my ancestry and Trinidad background, that with another, equally important part of myself, I was part of a larger civilization." (*Our Universal Civilization* www.nybooks.com) Furthermore, in the essay "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817" Homi Bhabha notices that Naipaul's engagement with the history of the Thirld World is mainly aesthetic- informed by values such as "civility" and "the autonomy of art":

It is to preserve the peculiar sensibility of what he understands as a tradition of civility that Naipaul "translates" Conrad, from Africa to the Caribbean, in order to transform the despair of postcolonial history into an appeal for the autonomy of art (4)

Thus the ideal of the writer as an objective judge of situations, the individual personality both mixing and staying away from the crowds creates the narrator of both *An Area of Darkness* and *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*.

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6.Conclusion

The question of how to assess Naipaul's identity as a writer is a crucial one for the understanding of his writing, or so goes the argument in postcolonial theory, preoccupied with giving voice to the subaltern and oppressed classes and deconstructing hegemonic discourses of power. But what if the kind of social and cultural identity on which postcolonial studies are premised is rejected by Naipaul? The answer was to place him in the category of diaspora or exile studies (Stuart Hall 492). Diaspora writers and intellectuals, Hall argues, share a condition of displacement and deracination, as their identity cannot be rooted either in the home or the host society. Whereas this definition holds true for Naipaul as well as a host of other contemporary writers and intellectuals, it does not provide enough relevance for an in-depth analysis of Naipaul. He is an extremely idiosyncratic and often deceptive writer. By carefully studying his prose, one can find criticisms of European imperialism, Muslim fundamentalism and feudalism, Indian inefficiency and backwardness, Trinidadian futility and mediocrity. He is a sharp observer and interpreter of the false spirit of revolutions, a good diagnostician of colonial diseases, a fine analyst of almost any type of society. He focuses especially on those societies that undergo some sort of transition, either from a state-based to a market based economy, or from one kind of rule to another and he developed the bulk of his work in a period in which most colonies had just acquired independence and were working on developing democracy, while the dominant countries were slowly heading for a neo-liberal and global policy due to the economic fall at the end of the sixties. In conclusion, it seems unproductive to tie Naipaul to any narrow identification with ethnic or national communities, as he refuses ascriptions. On the other hand, his strong sense of his writer identity, which is understood in terms of journalistic objectivity and an existential search for truth, is what prompts him to undertake a thorough criticism of the societies he visits or lives in, but only as a traveler- perpetually puzzled by the "enigma of arrival".

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